

JOHN MILTON  
(1608—1674)  
24. R.R.

Birth and Parentage—

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608, in Bread Street, London, in a home which bore the sign of the Spread-Eagle, the device of the Milton family. His father, whose name was also John, had been disowned by his family upon his abandonment of Roman Catholicism for the reformed faith. He had thereupon settled in the metropolis where he became a successful scrivener. This profession included, along with money-lending, many of the functions now performed by solicitors. The elder Milton was distinguished by intellectual ability and by the wonderful integrity of his life. He was undoubtedly a man of forceful personality. Though of pronounced Puritan proclivities, he had no antipathy to literature and art. He was, in fact, an accomplished musician and a composer of some repute. Life in his home, though sober and even a little austere, was by no means lacking in the influences of liberal culture and refinement. It was thus in a singularly favourable atmosphere that Milton's nature began to expand. He was the third child of his parents and was a singularly beautiful boy. He must have been the pride of his mother's heart. When Shakespeare left London for Stratford, Milton was three or four years old. We may fondly imagine that

Shakespeare, who frequented the Mermaid Tavern in the same street, may have seen the beautiful child whose name in after-times was to stand second to his own, among the renowned English poets.

Milton's life easily falls into three well-defined divisions. The first period closes with his return from Italy in 1639; the second at the Restoration in 1660; and the third is brought to a close with his death in 1674.

### **Education—**

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The father who seems to have recognised very early his son's genius tried to give him the best education that London could afford. The instruction given at home was supplemented by the private lessons from an excellent tutor Thomas Young. His regular training began in St. Paul's School, and from the very beginning he devoted himself to studies with tireless devotion and singular enthusiasm. And thus, even as a boy, Milton laid the firm foundations of immense erudition which distinguished him later in life. "My father" writes Milton, "destined me from a child to the pursuit of literature". This clear aim set before the boy early in life could only be realised by ceaseless pursuit of knowledge and Milton never spared himself. "My appetite for knowledge," he says, "was so varacious, that from twelve years of age I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight." This impaired his eyesight which was naturally weak, and later in life was responsible for complete loss of vision.

Milton acquired proficiency in various languages, and naturally Latin and Greek claimed greater attention. He began to compose verses even in his school days, and one of the poems *On the Death of a Fair Infant* is still extant. But for the time being

his powers were shown in the accumulation of knowledge than in writing original poetry. His passion for learning was combined with a noble and high idealism. In *Paradise Regained* occur the following lines, the autobiographical significance of which cannot be overlooked:—

"When I was yet a child, no child play  
To Me was pleasing; all my mind was set  
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do,  
What might be public Good; Myself I thought  
Born to that end, born to promote all truth,  
All righteous things: therefore above My years  
The Law of God I read and found it sweet."

At the age of sixteen Milton entered Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1625, and remained there for seven years till 1632. His experience of University life had not been wholly fortunate, and his feelings for Cambridge were none of the kindest. But he worked steadily and took his B. A. and M. A. degrees in 1629 and 1632 respectively. His remarkable classical scholarship, the fairness of his complexion and his personal beauty attracted the attention of every one at the University. His purity of life, unflinching devotion to moral principles and the charm of personality gained for him the nickname of "the Lady of Christ's". He lived moderately and temperately while his college companions indulged in the grossest debaucheries and freely drank to excess. Milton has referred to his college life in a passage of supreme beauty in *Lycidas*.

Before leaving the University Milton had proved himself a poet. He had written the exquisite ode

*At a Solemn Music*, and the *Nativity Hymn* (1629), besides Latin verses. The ode is one of the finest in English literature.

#### At Horton—

Milton's father had designed that he should enter the Church, but at Cambridge he had come to realize that Holy Orders for him were impossible. He was struck by the corruption among clergymen and instead of becoming one of them it was better to attempt reform from outside. Then he thought of law, but that idea, too, was soon abandoned. His father who was in comfortable circumstances, left the young man to shape his career in accordance with his personal desires and aims. When the elder Milton retired to Horton, he also joined him there and stayed with him for five years till 1639. The five years spent at Horton in a quiet retreat were utilised by Milton in completing his education. He devoted himself more ardently to self preparation for his future work. He stored his mind with varied learning, and it may safely be asserted that his immense learning became a part and parcel of himself. It was his constant resolve to achieve something that should vindicate the ways of God to men, something great which would require his full powers to accomplish. He had been dreaming of this all the time and his labours at Horton made a great achievement possible. He wrote once : “the inward prompting which grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something as written to after times, as they should not willingly let it die”. This feeling was almost constantly present in his mind and urged him to make the best of his unique powers.

(In all probability it was at Horton that he composed his best lyric poetry. L' Allegro, Il Penseroso, Arcades, Comus and Lycidas were produced during this period of intense study. It is remarkable that his vast learning was never allowed to chill his creative imagination. These lyrical poems have all the charm and freshness of youth, and exhibit the lighter and more fanciful side of Milton's genius. Though he was so young when he wrote these poems he shows himself in them an incomparable artist and produces astonishing music even when he uses the instrument prescribed by tradition. The unique and essential Miltoinc quality of majesty is already there. It is no exaggeration to say that the poetic activity at Horton would alone, was sufficient to win him immortality, though the organ-voice of England had not yet produced one of the greatest epic poems of the world.)

### Travels—

In the spring of 1638 he left England on a visit to foreign lands. Passing through France and north Italy he reached Florence, where he spent two months and made the acquaintance of many noble and learned men and visited the art gallaries and other places of interest. Then he proceeded to Rome "where the antiquity and ancient renown of the city detained him nearly three months." He desired to go to Sicily and Greece but changed his mind at the news of the outbreak of hostilities between the king and the parliament in England. "I thought it disgraceful," he wrote, "while my countrymen were fighting, for liberty that I should be travelling abroad for pleasure". He returned to England by way of Venice and Geneva, and settled in London. He remained abroad for some

sixteen months and his return home marked the close of the first period in his life.

### The Second Period (1639-1660)—

For the next twenty years Milton keenly interested himself with the social, political and religious problems of his country. His thoughts were filled with the question of Church reform, education, marriage and above all, politics. This period was, as regards poetry, almost entirely barren. Immediately after his return from the Continent he wrote the *Epitaphium Damonis*, a Latin elegy on the death of his dearly loved friend Diodati, and in all these twenty years he did not write more than a dozen sonnets. For some years he took pupils, but his main purpose was to lend the full force of his personality and powerful pen in the cause of reform. "I resolved" he says, "though then meditating other matters to transfer into this struggle all my genius and all the strength of my industry." And he kept up his resolve most manfully.

The first treatise upon the government of the Established Church appeared from his pen in 1641 and then pamphlets followed in quick succession. The cry of the Puritans was to abolish episcopacy and Milton vehemently carried on his assaults with an eloquence and vigour all his own. He demanded the establishment of a Presbyterian system in place of episcopacy.

In 1643 Milton married Mary Powell, the seventeen-year old daughter of a Justice of the Peace at Forest Hill, near Oxford. Her upbringing in a gay household had unfitted her to be the wife of a man twice her age and so serious as Milton. After only one month of married life she left her husband and returned to her friends. The immediate

outcome of this unhappy marriage was the pamphlets on Divorce. These pamphlets like nearly all his controversial writings, have three fatal defects. They are utterly blind to the temper of those to whom they are addressed, to the reasonable arguments of opponents, and to the practical difficulties of the proposals made. Two years later Mary Powell's family was in great distress because they had supported the failing royalist cause. They were anxious for a reconciliation between the truant wife and her husband, who had become a man of importance and belonged to the winning side. They managed to introduce her in his presence; she fell upon her knees, begging forgiveness and was at once forgiven. He received her back, helped the Powell family and gained her respect and affection. She died in 1652.

The *Tractate of Education* published in 1644 was the result of his interest in education. He considered as a theorist the best educational methods. Soon afterwards he found himself engaged in writing political pamphlets. By far the best of them is *Aeropagitica*, a plea for the free expression of opinion and the liberty of the press.

Milton's anti-royalist activities brought their reward when he boldly vindicated the trial of Charles I. He was offered the post of Latin Secretary to the Council of State, in which supreme power was now vested. Henceforth he became a European celebrity and the foreigners who came to England desired to see Milton with the same eagerness with which they met Cromwell. For eleven years Milton retained this post and it brought him into contact with important personalities and gave him an insight into the motives of human actions. But he had always to justify the policy of the Council and he became its special advocate and had to take part in un-edifying controversies.

Pamphlets after pamphlets had to be published and Milton took his work very seriously. While engaged over the preparation of a counterblast to his adversaries he completely lost his eyesight which had been gradually failing since his student days. It was certainly an evil day when Milton left poetry and quiet study at Horton and entered as a combatant in the arena of political and religious controversies. The most productive period of life which had better been devoted to the enrichment of literature and poetry, was wasted upon things of the moment, which did not require the genius of a Milton.

Three years after his wife's death Milton married Catherine Woodstock, but she also died only fifteen months later, after giving birth to a daughter, who only survived a short time.

### The Third Period (1660—1674)—

At the Restoration of Charles Milton was dismissed from his office. For a time he had to remain in hiding and was in custody also. He was released and was a freeman again when the Act of Indemnity was passed. The Restoration in 1660 brought about the ruin of his party and overthrow of the cause which he had espoused for the last twenty years. But it proved a blessing in disguise as it left Milton free and restored him to poetry and literature. Milton not only showed that he had lost none of his poetic powers, but returned to poetry with a larger experience of human motives and the world. The great work that he accomplished now perhaps would have lost some of its beauty and a wider outlook, if Milton had remained in seclusion only courting the Muse.

At the age of fifty-two Milton was thrown back upon poetry, and could at length discharge his self-

imposed obligation by giving to the world his greatest work. He began to write *Paradise Lost* about 1658 choosing the theme and its form after a long and anxious consideration. For five years he worked continuously at it and finished it in 1663. It was published in 1667 and Milton received only £ 5 from the publisher. A chance remark of a friend suggested *Paradise Regained* and that too was finished with equal care and was soon followed by the publication of *Samson Agonistes*. The magnificent achievements of these years by the blind poet have placed him among the greatest poets of the world. How happy Milton must have felt on the completion of these great works and the fulfillment of his great dream in life, can only be imagined. It is not necessary to discuss these works in detail here.

The last four years of Milton's life were devoted to prose works which have no interest for us now. In 1664 he married for the third time and chose Elizabeth Minshull as a partner of life in his last years. The marriage proved quite happy and Milton enjoyed the renown and admiration of people which were his due. For ten years his wife tended him with affectionate devotion, and proved a kind step-mother to his three daughters. He died in 1674, on November 8th. and was buried in the chancel of St. Giles's Church, Cripplegate, beside his father.

### Milton's Character—

From first to last Milton lived his life at a high moral tension; and his tremendous earnestness, his passionate zeal for righteousness, his ardent patriotism, his never-failing devotion to duty, combine to make him worthy of our deepest veneration. His piety was admitted even by his enemies. Conscious that his every action was performed beneath his

"great Taskmaster's eye" he thought of existence as a service and lived a truly dedicated life. We can feel the spirit of his high idealism in all the stormy activities of his public career. He realized to the full the greatness of his genius and always aimed to use it in a religious spirit. Large as was his intellectual vision, generous as was his scholarship, his moral outlook was somewhat narrow; his temper hard and inflexible. His faults were in a large measure fostered by Puritanism and a reaction against the flippant spirit of the age. Austere, uncompromisingly exacting, stern, sometimes stiff-necked he had too little tolerance for the weakness of average humanity; too little of the charity which is careful at all times to distinguish between the sin and the sinner. However severly we may judge his shortcomings, his supreme greatness as a man cannot for a moment be questioned even by those who dissent the most profoundly from his politics and his theology. Milton the man is inseparable from the poet and the admiration we feel his genius may quite justly be given to his character. Great himself he fills us with an exalting conviction of the greatness of human life. It is impossible not to catch from him some sense of the high issues, immediate and eternal. In his famous sonnet on Milton Wordsworth says :—

We are selfish men ;

Oh ! raise us up, return to us again ;

And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

His personality is an unfailing source of these virtues.

#### Milton as a poet—

Milton is said to harmonise the Renaissance and the Puritan spirit. But it is the spirit of Puritanism

which grew forceful as he attained maturity of power. As in the case of his father we find that Milton's Puritanism was not antagonistic to his sense of beauty. It was his sincere belief that true poetry can only be written by one whose life is a true poem.]

English poetry between the time of Shakespeare and Milton has many gifts and graces, but the quality of greatness and sublimity was imparted to it by Milton. In everything he did he was himself and his own master. He devised his own subjects and wrote his own style. He stands alone and must be judged alone. Poetry has been by far the greatest achievement of England and Milton is by far the greatest poetic artist. Shakespeare is a greater genius but he is inferior to Milton in art. No poet has produced works so conscientiously perfect as Milton. He gives to the beauty of his verse a delicacy and gravity all its own. For him poetry is no mere amusement or product of momentary inspirations. It is a high and grave thing, a thing of the choicest discipline of phrase, the finest craftsmanship of structure, the most nobly ordered music of sound.

With his strong sense of beauty he combines a stateliness of manner which imparts a high dignity to his poetry. This quality of dignity has never been surpassed and rarely equalled in English literature.

Common objects of everyday interest do not form the subject matter of his poetry. As he 'dwelt apart' so are his themes far removed from the trivialities of life. His problems are of eternal interest and his genius can find full scope in dealing with grand themes : the problem of man's origin and destiny, of the ways of God to man. His heroic temper entitles him to be classed among the royal souls, those natu-

real kings of men, who are born to rule and inspire their fellows. His consummate perfection of art, unerring sense of beauty and harmony and dignified treatment of grand themes have eternalized the works of Milton. His blank verse stands unique and unsurpassed in richness and in variety.

Milton's wealth of classical mythology and allusiveness is unbounded. His command over the vocabulary and idiomatic capacities of the language is immense. His poems are suffused with classical atmosphere, but he combines mythology with imagination and makes a remarkably apt use of classical allusions. Hardly any poet excels Milton in his magnificent rhythm, surprising harmony, sustained strength of imagination and boldness of design.

Milton has his limitations but they are not so very serious faults as to detract from the quality of his work. He is at times over-serious and totally lacks the sense of humour. Perhaps humour could find no place in his works for its want was due to the temperament of the poet. Though he wrote lyric poems of singular beauty, excellent sonnets, classical dramas and a grand epic, his range is undoubtedly narrow. The full gamut of human emotions does not find an ample expression in his poetry. His deep classical learning is responsible for introducing too many classical allusions. Latinisms abound in the construction of his periods. His popularity among general readers is not in proportion to his real merit and greatness.

His treatment of nature is rather defective. He seldom sees nature directly and it only calls up reminiscences of his classical studies. Milton's main theme being man we fail to find in him the close and minute

observation of nature as in Tennyson. Nor is nature a source of inspiration as Wordsworth found it.

(Milton, however, is the greatest name in English poetry after Shakespeare. Shelley calls him the "third among the sons of light", and his works will ever remain an eternal possession not only of the English race but of the whole world. Tennyson's eulogy beautifully expresses the sentiments of Milton's readers :—

" O Mighty-mouth'd inventor of harmonies,  
O skill'd to sing of Time and Eternity,  
God-gifted organ-voice of England,  
Milton, a name to resound for ages ;"—)

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## LYCIDAS

### INTRODUCTION.

#### Occasion of the poem—

Five years after Milton had left Cambridge, on August 10, 1637, a fellow of Christ's College, Edward King, was drowned while on a voyage from Chester to Ireland. The ship on which he was going from England struck in calm weather upon a rock, and most of the persons on board were drowned. King was only twenty-five years old at the time of death. He had been slightly junior to Milton at the University, but there may have been some intimacy or friendship between them. King was a scholar of great promise and was much loved by his fellow students who esteemed him for his piety and learning. When the news of his death was known at Cambridge in the ensuing Michaelmas term his friends decided to publish a volume of elegiac verses as an expression of the University's regret at his untimely death in tragic circumstances. Milton's contribution to the memorial volume was *Lycidas*.

Such collections of verses were published on special occasions and some of them are preserved in College libraries. That Edward King was honoured in this manner is the proof of his popularity and esteem in which he was held at Cambridge. The little volume printed in 1638 at the University Press consists of about fifty pages and is divided into two sections. In the first are twenty-three Latin-

and Greek elegies ; the second contains thirteen English pieces, the last of which is entitled *Lycidas* and signed 'J. M., Nov. 1637'. Needless to say that the last is the greatest poem of the collection. Milton composed *Lycidas* in the autumn of 1637, and was, perhaps, approached by a Cambridge friend to contribute to the memorial volume. There is some reason to suppose that Milton, being at Horton, did not know all the details of the circumstances in which King had met his death. It is said that when the ship was sinking and everybody was trying to save himself King knelt on the deck and was praying as the ship went down. This touching scene has been mentioned in several poems but Milton does not mention it at all. It is also said that King refused to enter a boat and gave others an opportunity to escape. Another point which shows the incorrectness of Milton's account is that the ship was wrecked in perfectly calm weather. King's brother says that stormy weather brought about the disaster. Perhaps Milton mentions fair weather to heighten the pathos of the scene.

#### Title—

The name 'Lycidas' is borrowed by the poet from the Greek and Latin pastorals. It occurs both in Theocritus and Virgil. It is the name of a shepherd in the Greek pastoral poet Theocritus Idyl viii, and Virgil has the same name for one of the speakers in his 9th Eclogue. The original manuscript of the poem is preserved at Trinity. Milton subsequently revised the poem and there are corrections made on the margin in the poet's handwriting. In 1645 in the finally revised edition Milton prefixed the long subtitle, "In this monodie, the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And, by occasion, foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy then in their height."

This sub-title seems to have become necessary, as some explanation for the general reader was required of the circumstances in which the poem was written, and because in 1645 Milton could openly and fearlessly announce his attack on the Church and his hopes of its downfall in future.

### Form of the poem—

*Lycidas* is professedly a pastoral elegy. It is most pastoral of all Milton's pastoral poems. It is a poem in which a shepherd is represented as lamenting the death of his companion. Such poetry is of classical origin. It originated with the Greeks, Theocritus and Bion, and then its scope was widened by the Latin Virgil. For centuries it fell out of currency till Renaissance recalled it to life and made it popular once more in Italy. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries this type of poetry appealed strongly to cultured, academic tastes from the very fact that it was intensely artificial. It presented idealised scenes of primitive life. Italy set the literary fashion in those days for the European countries; and consequently poets in England also began to write pastoral poetry. Spenser in his *Shepherd's Calendar* followed the Italian models but tried to make his rural scenes natural and true to English life, and introduced rustics and their dialect. The impetus given by Spenser to this form of poetry had not died away when Milton wrote his *Lycidas*. It was Spenser's influence which led Milton to choose this particular form of poetry for the expression of his regret at the death of his friend. "It is not," writes Casson, "a direct lyric of lamentation by Milton for the death of King; it is a phantasy of one shepherd, mourning, in the time of autumn, the death of a fellow shepherd. The mourning shepherd, however, is Milton himself: and

the shepherd mourned for is Edward King; and, through the guise of all the pastoral circumstances and imagery of the poet, there is a studious representation of the real facts of King's brief life and his accidental death and of Milton's regard for him and academic intimacy with him."

The lines in the poem (23-26) describing Milton's life at the University in company with King have been literally interpreted to signify real objects and persons. Christ's College, Cambridge, is the "self-same hill" "we drove afield" etc., are the common pursuits of the two friends: the Satyrs and Fauns are the under-graduates, the "rural ditties", the College exercises; and "Old Dameas," Milton's tutor Mr. Chappell, delighting to correct those exercises—"hear our song". Perhaps Milton did not mean to go so far as to suggest all these details. The pastoral form is a convention and the reader has no right to expect every conventional remark to be a reality under a pretty disguise. We must not read between all the lines for a hidden meaning. The pastoral elegy, except in its earliest and simplest form is artificial: that is, it is not a direct and simple poetic expression of grief, but an elaborate composition in which real feeling is blended with fanciful conceits, classical allusions, etc., worked up with artistic skill.  
**Does it express personal grief?**—

Dr. Johnson was strongly of opinion that *Lycidas* was devoid of real grief. He argued, "passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Minicus, nor tells of rough Satyrs and Faun with cloven heel. Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief." But the learned doctor's opinion is not necessarily correct. No poet can avoid some kind of artificiality if elects to express his grief,

however sincere, in any conventional form of expression. When Milton wrote a pastoral poem he had to abide by the rules of art governing that particular type of poetry and we have no reason to doubt the sincerity of his feelings. Symbolism and allegory are inseparable from pastoral poetry and by its nature it is artificial. Dr. Johnson's mistake lies in confusing the truth of life with the truth of art. To many persons an elegy is an expression of pastoral sorrow, and it can be effective only when written in the most direct and simple way. If this argument is pursued to its logical conclusion, poetry itself being governed by its conventional laws can never be a suitable vehicle for the expression of any sincere sentiment.

Professor Verity does not agree with Dr. Johnson but at the same time he finds no reason to think that Milton was deeply affected by the death of Edward King. If Milton had not written *Lycidas* King's name would have remained obscure. Milton's grief on the death of his friend Diodati, which he expressed in the famous Latin elegy, *Epitaphium Damonis* is certainly more personal. To King he seems to offer tribute, whereas his heart weeps forth for Diodati, though both the poems are pastoral. *Lycidas*, therefore, is to be taken, as Professor Verity says, "a study in the pastoral style". Milton had carefully studied the Greek and Italian pastoral writers and their modern Italian imitators, and found a suitable opportunity of weaving this knowledge into an exquisite fabric of learning and literary suggestion and artistic pathos. Nothing could have been more appropriate to the occasion ; but we have no means of penetrating behind the scenes and deciding whether the emotion is pastoral or 'dramatic'.

#### Other Objections—

One of the objections urged against *Lycidas* is that it does not express the personal grief of Milton

and it exhibits no real sorrow at all. It has first been answered. *Lycidas* is primarily a work of art governed by certain conventions and it should be judged from that point of view. Whether Milton's grief was poignant or not, he cannot be charged with *insincerity*.

Another ground on which *Lycidas* is censured is that a passage (118—131) is an indefensible digression distracting attention from the main theme of the poem into a wholly different channel. The digression is a strong invective against the Church, and cannot be justified on the ground that King was to take holy orders. The passage objected to is the finest in the poem, but the incongruity seems to be equally great. We must remember that in those days this strong censure of the Church could not offend the reader or seem quite out of place as it might appear now.

That St. Peter has been introduced among pagan gods and he is quite out of place in pastoral imagery, is another objection. The use of allegory and the blending of scriptural and mythological associations were very common in the poetry of the period. The introduction of St. Peter might seem incongruous to us but the practice of those days and even of earlier writers sanctioned the blending of Christianity with pastoral imagery. It had long been a tradition of pastoral writers to associate Christian sentiment with paganism. Milton did not offend against the prevailing taste.

There is one more digression on Fame (64-84), but it is not so unjustifiable or irrelevant as the denunciation of Episcopacy. We must, however, remember one thing that he attacks the whole Church. He limits his remarks to the corrupt elements, though

a few years later he regarded the corruption to have become universal

### Milton's attitude towards the Church—

The state of the Church was very deplorable in the days of Milton. Episcopacy was the established form of Church government in England against which Milton wrote in his *Lycidas*. It was a form of government by Prelates or a body of Church dignitaries. There was regular hierarchy or rank among them, e.g. Episcopacy was termed Prelacy as a term of reproach by those who were hostile to this system of government. Laud made abundant and unrestrained use of his infernal machinery with prisoners for conscience's sake. John Bastwick one of those who suffered, declared in his 'Litany' that "Hell was broke loose, and devils and surplices, hoods, copes and rochets, were come among us". Such was the corruption among the powerful clergymen. Burton, a London clergyman sentenced by the High Commission called on all Christians to resist the Bishops as "robbers of Souls, limbs of the Beast and factors of Antichrist". Even the noblest puritan was driven to exasperation. And we are not surprised by the vehement denunciation of Milton "blind mouths that scarce themselves know to hold a sheep book", and to whom "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed", "while the grim wolf" of Rome "with privy paw daily devours space, and nothing said!"

Milton desired that Episcopacy should be replaced by Presbyterianism, a form of church government which invests presbyters or priests with all spiritual power and admits no prelates over them. It was made the state religion by the Long Parliament.

ut Milton soon discovered that Presbyterianism was as intolerant and tyrannical as Episcopacy; and he denounced the former also. They too were given oppression and greed of gain. He wrote; "New presbyter is but old priest writ large". He left the presbyterian party in 1647 and joined Independents; Congragationalists, who allowed freedom of conscience in the mode of worshipping God.

From Milton's poems we can find the gradual change which came over his religious views and his attitude towards the Church. He changed his opinions which he held when *Lycidas* was written.

metre—

Milton remains by far the surest and greatest instrumentalist, outside the drama, of the English unrhymed line. His pre-eminence in blank verse is never been challenged, and no poet has excelled him. The base-metre of *Lycidas* is the rimed five cent and ten syllable iambic line, the rimes occurring irregular intervals and often more than once. Though the normal line is iambic pentametre, rhyming irregularly or capriciously, there are occasional lines of shorter length. This is a noticeable feature in the metrical structure of *Lycidas*. Milton's use of lines of irregular length grouped in what Professor Masson happily terms "free musical paraphs" was a device borrowed from Italian writers. His irregular type of versification is described as unfettered, (*Apolelymenou*). There are two great dangers of blank verse, its stiffness or monotony owing to the sense generally ending with line, and degeneracy into a kind of barely metrical prose. Milton has very successfully avoided these defects by skilful use of *enjambement* and *caesura*. The position of the pause in the middle of the line

varies and the sense does not close with the end of a line. The irregularity of rhyme and metre is not unpolished crudity but a masterful manipulation. The variations in the length of the metre have been made to reflect the shifting passions which the subject inspires. Milton secures wonderfully musical effects and emotion seems to find its exact equivalent in verbal expression. It may be noted that lines, 1, 13, 15, 22, 39, 51, 82, 91, 92, and 161 rhyme to nothing but they have been so artfully spaced that we are apt to overlook them.

Landor's following remark is noteworthy:—

"No poetry so harmonious (*i. e.*, as *Lycidas*) has ever been written in our language, but in the same free metre both Tasso and Guarini had captivated the ear of Italy".

### CRITICAL REMARKS ON LYCIDAS.

#### 1

One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is *Lycidas*; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers displeasing. What beauty there is we must seek in the sentiment and images. It is not to be considered as the expression of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon, Arthuse and Mineins, nor tells of rough Satyrs and Fauns with cloven heels. Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief.

In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting: whatever images it can supply are low.

ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. What image of tenderness can be excited by these lines?

" We drove afield, and both together heard  
 What time the grey fly winds her sultry horn,  
 Battenning our flocks with the fresh dews of  
 night."

We know that they never drove afield, and that they had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation is allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought because it cannot be known when it is found.

Among the flocks and copses and flowers appear the heathen deities; Jove and Phaebus, Neptune and Æolus, with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a college easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; and how one god asks another god what is become of *Lycidas* and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour.

This poem has yet a grosser fault. With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverened combinations. The shepherd likewise is now a feeder of sheep, and afterwards an ecclesiastical pastor, a superintendent of a Christian flock. Such equivocations are always unskilful; but here they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety, of which, however, I believe the writer not to have been conscious.

Such is the power of reputation justly acquired, that its blaze drives away the eye from nice exami-

nation. Surely no man could have fancied that he read *Lycidas* with pleasure, had he not known its author.

*Johnson.*

2

He (Johnson) has passed condemnation upon *Lycidas* and has taken occasion, from that charming poem to expose to ridicule the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions as if *Lycidas* was the prototype and pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails in it, go for nothing. I am convinced by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton.

*Couper.*

3

If Dr. Johnson's prejudices have not led him in general to undervalue the poetry of Milton, his particular criticisms seem, however in some instances, to expose him to the charge of defective sensibility to poetic beauty which is too apparent in the whole course of his present labours. Nothing is indeed proved by setting one man's taste in opposition to another's, yet when Johnson says : "Surely no man could have fancied that he read *Lycidas* with pleasure, had he not known the author :" while Dr. Warton has represented a relish for the same performance as a test of true taste in poetry, we cannot but suspect a strange bluntness or perversion in the feelings of the one, even admitting somewhat of enthusiasm and learned prejudice in the other. Johnson, it is true, supported his censure of the piece by those arguments of plain sense which are pretty obvious, and against which it is often difficult for a work of imagination to stand ; and had the purpose

been to have shown how true genius might be misled by bad models and pedantry, the lesson would have been valuable; but that such defects should annihilate all pleasure in the perusal of a work abounding in strokes of high poetry, could only happen in a mind shut against those appeals to the fancy, and those elegant associations which are the very essence of the poets' art.

Dr. Aikin's Remarks on *Johnson's Life of Milton*.

## 4

In *Lycidas* (1637) we have reached the high water mark of English poetry and of Milton's own production. A period of a century and a half was to elapse before poetry in England seemed, in Wordsworth's '*Ode on Immortality*' (1807), to be rising again towards the level of inspiration which it had once attained in *Lycidas*. And in the development of Milton's genius this wonderful dirge marks the culminating point. As the twin idylls of 1632 show a great advance on the *Ode on the Nativity* (1629), the growth of the poetic mind during the five years that follow 1632 is registered in *Lycidas*. Like the *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas* is laid out on the lines of the accepted pastoral fiction; like them, it offers exquisite touches of idealised rural life. But *Lycidas* opens up a deeper vein of feeling, a patriot passion so vehement and dangerous, that, like that which stirred the Hebrew prophet, it is compelled to veil itself from power, or from sympathy, in utterance made purposely enigmatical. The passage which begins "Last came and last did go", raises in us a thrill of awe-struck expectation which I can only compare with that excited by the Cassandra of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. For the reader to feel this, he must have present in memory the circumstances of England in 1637. He must

place himself as far as possible in the situation of a contemporary. The study of Milton's poetry compels the study of his time; and Professor Masson's six volumes are not too much to enable us to understand that there were real causes for the intense passion which glows underneath the poet's words—a passion which unexplained would be thought to be intrusive.

The historical exposition must be gathered from the English history of the period, which may be read in Professor Masson's excellent summary. All I desire to point out here is, that in *Lycidas*, Milton's original picturesque vein is the first time crossed with one of quite another sort, stern, determined, obscurely indicative of suppressed passion, and the resolution to do or die. The fanaticism of the covenanter and the sad grace of Petrarch seem to meet in Milton's monody. Yet these opposites, instead of neutralising each other, are blended into one harmonious whole by the presiding, but invisible, genius of the poet. The conflict between the old cavalier world—the years of gaiety and festivity of a splendid and pleasure-loving court, and the new puritan world into which love and pleasure were not to enter—this conflict which was commencing in the social life of England, is also begun in Milton's own breast, and is reflected in *Lycidas*.

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill.  
Here is the sweet mournfulness of the Spenserian  
time, upon whose joys Death is the only intruder.  
Pass on-ward a little, and you are in presence of  
the tremendous.

Two-handed engine at the door, the terror of  
which is enhanced by its obscurity. We are very  
sure that the avenger is there, though we know not

who he is. In these thirty lines we have the preluding mutterings of the storm, which was to weep away mask and reveland song, to inhabit the drama, and suppress poetry. In the earlier poems Milton's muse has sign in the tones of the age that is passing away; the poet is, except in his austere chastity, a cavalier. (Though even in *L'Allegro* Dr. Johnson truly detects "some melancholy in his mirth".) In *Lycidas*, for a moment, the tones of both ages, the past and the coming, are combined, and then Milton leaves behind him for ever the golden age, and one half of his poetic genius. He never fulfilled the promise with which *Lycidas* concludes "To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new".

*Mark Pattison.*

## 5

Even in *Lycidas* he is thinking of himself as much as of his dead companion.

So may some gentle Muse  
With lucky words favour *my* destined urn  
And as he passes turn,  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud".

What if he die young himself? Are his dreams and hopes for his own future an illusion? He agonises with the question on the famous digression on poetry and poetic fame. But he consoles himself by appeal to a court where the success and fame of his world are as straw in the furnace; and then, having duly performed the obsequies of his friend, with reinvigorated heart he turns once more to the future. "To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new". A singular ending, no doubt, to an elegy!

But it is blind and hasty to conclude that therefore the precedent laments are "not to be considered as the effusion of real passion".

*Raleigh.*

6

What he meditated as this time and through his Italian journey was an Epic, but his wing bore him now into the flight of *Lycidas*. We see in it that vehement love of the beautiful, and I have no doubt that when he began it he wrote it with the close intensity of which he speaks above. It was finished in November 1637. It could scarcely have been begun till the end of September, for there is no mention either of its subject or itself in his letters to Diodati the last of which is dated September 23. Edward King, its subject, was a college friend of Milton's, a favourite of fortune and of all who knew him. Sailing from Chester to Dublin to visit his people, the ship struck on a rock in a calm sea, and he was drowned. His friends at Cambridge proposed a volume of memorial verses in Greek, Latin, and English. It saw the light in 1638, and Milton's *Lycidas* is the last poem in the book.

It is a pastoral, and in the form of other pastorals, with its introduction and its epilogue, and between them the monody of the shepherd who has lost his friend. Under the guise of one shepherd mourning another all Milton's relations with Edward King are expressed, and all his thoughts about his character and genius; and the poem, to be justly judged, must be read with the conditions of the pastoral as a form of verse present to the mind. That is enough to dispose of Johnson's unfavourable criticism, which quarrels with the poem for its want of passion and want of nature, and for its improbability. It is not

a poem of passionate sorrow, but of admiration and regret expressed with careful art and in a special artistic form; and the classical allusions and shepherd images and the rest are the necessary drapery of the pastoral, the art of which, and the due keeping to form in which, are as important to Milton, and perhaps more so, than his regret. We are made aware of this when we find Milton twice checking himself in the conduct of the poem for having gone beyond the limits of the pastoral.

The metrical structure, which is partly borrowed from Italian models, is as carefully wrought as the rest, and harmonised to the thoughts. "Milton's ear was a good second to his imagination". *Lycidas* appeals not only to the imagination but to the educated imagination. There is no ebb and flow of poetical power as in *Comus*; it is an advance on all his previous work, and it fitly closes the poetic labour of his youth. It is needless to analyse it, and all criticism is weaker than the poem itself. Yet we may say that one of its strange charms is its solemn undertone rising like a religious chant through the elegiac music; the sense of a stern national crisis in the midst of its pastoral mourning; the sense of Milton's grave force of character among the flowers and fancies of the poem; the sense of the Christian religion pervading the classical imagery. We might say that these things are ill-fitted to each other. So they would be, were not the art so fine and the poetry so overmastering; were they not fused together by genius into a whole so that the unfitness itself becomes fascination.

Stopford A Brooke.

The general scheme is that of a classical pastoral elegy; the verse form is a very peculiar, in fact,

upto its date, unique, arrangement of stanzas and lines of unequal length, for the most part irregularly, and not entirely rimed, but terminating in a regular octave. To what extent the poem expresses personal sorrow has been largely, but very unnecessarily questioned, as an elegy, it has, poetically speaking, no superior even in a language which contains the various laments on Sidney before, and *Adonais* and *Thyrsis* after. The whole poem is a tissue of splendid passages, not unconnected, but sewn cunningly together rather than woven in one piece as regards subject. One, however, of these passages contains, for the first time, a note 'prophesying war'. Up to this date, Milton's verse, though abstaining alike from the passionately amorist tone of contemporary profane lyric, and from the almost erotically mystical tone of contemporary sacred poetry, had contained nothing polemical, and even in the frequent eulogies of chastity in *Comus*, nothing positively austere. Here, St. Peter, coming among other symbolical figures to bewail the dead, is made to deliver a tremendous denunciation of what Milton directly entitled 'the corrupt clergy of the time, and a prophecy of their ruin. The strict propriety of this has been questioned, even by some who agree with Milton's views on the subject: the force and fire of the expression (not injured by a little obscurity, which, perhaps, was a necessary precaution) may be admitted by the most thorough admirer of Laud. And all the rest (except from the point of view of an objection to pedantry which is itself ultra-pedantic) is absolutely proof against criticism. There cannot be better verse than *Lycidas*.

*George Saintsbury.*

In the choice of the vehicle, the mode of composition, and the character of the style, the workman-

ship of *Lycidas* is inspired by the same principles as those which are so splendidly illustrated in the structure of *Comus*, but they are, of course, modified by the nature of the occasion. Attempts had been made to naturalise the pastoral elegy in English poetry, but no English poet had yet succeeded in reproducing the Doric effect of the Greek pastoral. Milton achieved the desired end by applying the imagery of the Doric pastoral to the actual circumstances of King's fate, and by animating the forms of Virgil and Theocritus with the life of English landscape. In none of his poems does he so directly imitate the manner of his Greek and Latin predecessors. While composing *Lycidas* Milton's memory was persistently haunted by recollection of the ancient poets whom he so judiciously imitated. Nor did he make less use of his reading among the English poets.

But in *Lycidas* the grand architectural genius of Milton silences all inclination to prepare against him the mean charge of plagiarism. The design of the poem is completely original, and the perfect order in which the selected thoughts are subordinated to the central idea shows that, in the appropriation of isolated phrases, Milton was merely employing Memory in the service of Invention. The artistic arrangement of materials, the judicious choice and combination of words and images, the air of life and freshness given by the removal of old thoughts into a new context, all unite to make *Lycidas* perhaps the most beautiful, certainly the most sublime, pastoral elegy which the world possesses.

*Courthope (adapted).*

But last of the English poems comes *Lycidas* a garden of magic beauty in a sterile land.

"In *Lycidas* we have reached the high water mark of English poetry," says Mr. Pattison, and all who love true poetry will pardon the hyperbole." In its imagery and arrangement the poem conforms to the pastoral models of Theocritus and Virgil, which the Italian Renaissance poets had revived, and Spenser had introduced into England. It conforms also to mediæval models, consciously or unconsciously, in combining realism and idealism, Paganism and Christianity, with no sense of incongruity. Thus in an elegy which opens with an invocation to the muses who dwell by the well that springs beneath the seat of Jove, we hear the dread 'voice' of the "Pilot of the Galilean Lake", and *Lycidas* is at once shepherd of bucolic Arcadia and a type of the true pastors of the Christian Church, just as the Gods Pan, in Mediæval legend, sometimes represents the Christ.

*Lycidas* is the elegy of much more than Edward King, it is the last note of the inspiration of an age that was passing away. It is redolent of the 'sweet mournfulness of the Spenserian time, upon whose joys death is the only intruder'. No such elegy was to adorn our English literature until, two hundred years after, Shelley and Mathew Arnold produced the two elegiac poems which alone in our language deserve to rank with Milton's—for the wider scope of *In Memoriam* removes it from this category. *Thyrsis* excels *Lycidas* in the expression of chastened sorrow and tender recollection, but Mathew Arnold loved Clough and Oxford as Milton never loved King or Cambridge. *Adonais* is charged with deeper thought and more harmonious passion; but both owe to *Lycidas* a debt which *Lycidas* owes to no other poem.

time and space. If it did, the effect produced would not be a poetic effect; the experience of the reader would not be a poetic experience. The poet must transform or transcend the facts which have set his powers to work; he must escape from them or rather lift them up with him new-created into the world of the imagination; he must impose upon them a new form, invented or accepted by himself, and in any case so heated by his own fire of poetry that it can fuse and reshape the matter submitted to it into that unity of beauty which is a work of art. That is what Milton does in *Lycidas* by the help of the pastoral fiction; and what he could not have done without it or some imaginative substitute for it.

The truest criticism on his pastoralism is really that that mould was too small and fragile to hold all he wanted to put into it. The great outburst of St. Peter, with its scarcely disguised assault upon the Laudian clergy, strains it almost to bursting. Yet no one would wish it away; for it adds a passage of Miltonic fire to what but for Phoebus and St. Peter would be too plaintive to be fully characteristic of Milton whose genius lay rather in strength than in tenderness. Yet we, perhaps, love *Lycidas* all the more for giving us our almost solitary glimpse of a Milton, in whom the affections are more than the will, and sorrow not sublimated into resolution. Its modesty, too, is astonishing. He had already written the *Nativity Ode*, *Comus*, and *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, and yet he fancies himself still unripe for poetry and is only forced by the "bitter constraint" of the death of his friend to pluck the berries of his laurel which seem to him still "harsh and crude" for of course these allusions refer to his own immaturity and not, as Todd thought, to that of his friend. And the presence

of the same over mastering emotion which compelled him to begin is felt throughout. There is no poem of his in which he appears to make so complete a surrender to the changing moods of passion. The verses seem to follow his heart and fancy just where they choose to lead. We watch him as he thinks first of his friend's death and then of the duty of paying some poetic tribute to him; and so of his own death and of some other poet of the future who may write of it and—

“bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.”

How natural it is in all its superficial unnaturalness ! The walks and talks and verses made together at Cambridge so inevitably leading to the “heavy change now thou art gone, Now thou art gone and never must return”: and the fancy, partly but not wholly a reminiscence of their classical studies, that the trees and flowers which they had loved together must now be sharing the survivor's grief: the reproach to Nature and Nature's divinities following on the thought of Nature's sympathy, and followed by the first of the two incomparable returns upon himself which are among the chief beauties of the poem—

“ Ay me ! I fondly dream !

‘Had ye been there ; for what could  
that have done ?”

And so to the vanity of earthly fame and the thought of another fame which is not vanity. Twice he seems to be going to escape out of the world of pastoral, as he strikes his own trumpet note of confident faith and stern judgment; twice the unfailing instinct of art calls him back and makes a beauty of what might have been a mere incongruity.

"Return, Alpheus: the dread voice is past,  
That shrunk thy streams: return, Sicilian Muse,  
And call the vales, and bid them hither east  
Their bells and flowerets of a thousand hues".

The flowers come, in their amazing beauty, as poetry knows and names them, not altogether after the order of nature; till the fine flight is once more recalled to earth in that second return to the sad reality of things which provides the most beautiful, and as the manuscript shows, one of the most carefully elaborated passages in the whole—

"Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.  
For so, to interpose a little ease,  
Let our frail thought dally with false surmise.  
Ay me! whilst thes the shores and sounding seas  
Wash fa· away, wherever thy bones are burled,  
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world".

The least critical reader, when he is told that the daffodil and amaranthus lines were once in the reverse order, that the "frail thoughts" were at first "sad" and the "shores" "floods", and above all that the "whelming tide" was once a thing so insignificant as the "humming tide", can judge for himself by what a succession of inspirations a work of consummate art is produced.

This piece, unmatched in the whole range of English poetry, and never again equalled by Milton himself, leaves all criticism behind. Indeed so high is the poetic note here reached, that the common ear fails to catch it. *Lycidas* is the touch stone of taste; the 18th century criticism could not make anything of it. The very form of the poem is a stumbling-block to the common-sense critic. For while the equable and temperate emotion of *L'Allegro* allowed of direct expression in the poet's own person, the burning heat of passion in *Lycidas* has to be transferred into the artificial frame work of the conventional pastoral to make it approachable. At the same time it will be observed that this passion is not stirred by personal attachment, such as lends its pathos to *In Memoriam*. It is obvious from the elegy itself that Milton's relation to Edward King was not a specially tender relation. The sorrow for his loss does not go beyond such regret as may have been generally excited at Cambridge by the shock of such a casualty. It is when the poet passes on from the individual bereavement to generalise as to the fortunes of the Church, that he attains to a rapt grandeur of enigmatic denunciation in the lines 'Last came and last did go,' etc. In the suppressed passion of this Cassandra prophecy first emerges the Milton of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson*. The effect of the passage is enhanced by the contrast of the quiet beauty of the pastoral dirge in the preceding part of the poem. *Lycidas* accordingly marks the point of transition from the early Milton, the Milton of mask, pastoral, and idyll, to the quite other Milton, who after twenty years of hot party struggle, returned to poetry in another Vein,—never to the "woods and pasteurs" of which he took a final leave in *Lycidas*.

Milton had not the unspeakable pang of losing his friend in their fresh college-days had it been so we should perhaps have had a dirge wilder, more direct and stripped of all pastoral apparatus. However this may be, it would be an error to regret the allusive setting of *Lycidas* the underlying grief is really all the more poignant and profound because of it, and the reason lies in the peculiarity of Milton's nature.

For, during the years at Horton, Milton was not only—as we see from *L'Allegro* and *Comus*-purging and thrice—refining his diction: he was storing his mind with the scriptural, British and mediæval love, which was to furnish imagery for his epic. That love, which would only have cumbered a lesser man, gave the fulness to Milton's thoughts, the incomparable richness and resonance to his style. His speech became by second nature saturated with allusion; and the more deeply he felt a thing, the more he was moved, partly by his bent of genius, and partly by what Professor Masson so well calls the 'haughty delicacy', which shrank from naked self-revelation, to use the pastoral frame work which was consecrated to him by Virgil and *Theocrities*.) And in *Lycidas* he is more than justified by the effect. The solemnity of the strain, the stately music which becomes the more exquisite the oftener we hear it the majestic roll of proper-names, are all due to that fulness and selectiveness of Milton's mind, which makes the words reverberate with infinite associations.

#### Analysis of the Poem.

*Verity.*

1. *Occasion of the Poem.* The Poet apologises for attempting verse once more with immature

poetic powers. Gives the reason for writing poetry.  
 'I must write verse once more: prematurely, for  
 Lycidas has prematurely gone. He himself sang,  
 and he be sung' (Verity). 1-14.

2. *Invocation of the Muses.* The Elegy proper begins, 'Therefore Muses, sing loudly: may ye inspire some one to sing for me likewise when I am gone. 15-22.

3. *Poets personal relations with Lycidas.* 'Sing, for Lycidas and I shepherded and sang together. 23-36.

4. *Poets own sense of loss.* 'Thou art gone, and nature laments thee; thy loss is like a blight to thy fellow-shepherds'. 36-49.

5. *The guardian Nymphs, and even the Muse herself could not prevent it, though he was her true son.* 'Muses why were ye away when Lycidas sank? Yet why ask? Calliope herself could not save Orpheus. 50-63.

6. *The true poet and the nature of his reward.* (First rise to a higher mood.) Why labour at verse? Why not dally and write songs of dalliance? Fame spurs us on to write, but Atropos cuts us off on the verge of winning it. "Nay" says Apollo, fame is awarded in heaven, not on earth, do not flag, for Jove will judge right." 64-84.

7. *Neptune was not to blame for the loss.* 'Back to my pastoral mood! Triton asked the elements why Lycidas was drowned, and the answer was that the sea was calm and the ill-boding ship was answerable. 85-102.

8. *Camus, representing Cambridge, bewails his loss.* 'After the sea-God comes Camus, the god of the

river of Lycidas, and asks who has slain his dearest son'.  
103-107.

9. *St Peter, the guardian of the church sorely misses Lycidas as a true son.* The false sons of the church read their coming ruin. 'Last came Peter and sternly said, "Would some of the hireling shepherds had gone, and not thou Lycidas? They know nought of shepherding: their teaching satisfies not but corrupts the sheep, whom the papal wolf also devours apace. But their doom is at hand!" (Second rise to a higher mood.. 108-132.

10. All nature may well mourn his loss. 'Return, pastoral Muse: the thunder is spent, let the Sicilian vales send all their flowers to strew Lycid's hearse'. 132-151.

11. 'Sorrow loses itself in false surmises and hope arises. 'But the hearse is empty, and his bones are hurled—where? To the Hebrides, or the mount where Michael gazes? Michael restore him.' 152-164.

12. *Strain of joy and hope: Lycidas is not dead.* 'Weep no more. Like the sun, Lycid will rise again, by the might of his Saviour, and sing among the angels, and be the patron-saint of the sea-tossed.' 165-185.

13. *The Epilogue.* The shepherd-poet briefly reviews the song, and afterwards returns to his duties 'The minstrel ceases singing as the day goes down. The dirge is done; but the morrow brings new labour and shepherding'. 186-193.

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## IMPORTANT DATES IN MILTON'S LIFE.

1608. Milton born.

1620-24. At St. Paul's School.

1625. Milton goes to Cambridge.

1626. Milton's *Latin Elegies* and Lines *On the Death of a Fair Infant.*

1629. Milton takes B.A. degree. *Nativity Ode.*

1632. Milton takes M.A. degree.

1632-38. At Horton.

1633. *Arcades, L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (?)

1634. *Comus.*

1637. *Lycidas.*

1638-39. Milton resides abroad.

1639. *Italian Sonnets* and *Epilaphium Damonis.*

1641. *Four Pamphlets.*

1643. Milton's first marriage with Mary Powell.

1644. *Areopagitica, Tract on Education, Two Divorce Tracts.*

1645. *Divorce Tracts* and collected *Poems.*

1649. Milton appointed "Secretary of Foreign Tongues".

1652. Milton becomes blind. Death of first wife.

1657. Death of second wife, Catherine Woodlock.

- 1658. *Paradise Lost* begun.
- 1662. Milton's third marriage with Elizabeth Minshull.
- 1665. *Paradise Lost* completed, *Paradise Regained* begun.
- 1667. *Paradise Lost* published.
- 1670. *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* published.
- 1674. Second edition of *Paradise Lost*. Death of Milton.

## LYCIDAS

*Elegy on a friend drowned in the Irish Channel.*

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more  
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never-sere,  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
And with forced fingers rude,  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.

5

Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear  
Compels me to disturb your season due:  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not float upon his watery bier  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
Without the meed of some melodious tear.

10

Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well  
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,  
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.  
Hence with denial vain and coy excuse:  
So may some gentle Muse  
With lucky words favour my destined urn;  
And as he passes, turn,  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.

15

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,

20

Fed the same flock by fountain, shade, and rill.  
 Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd      25  
 Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,  
 We drove a-field, and both together heard  
 What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,  
 Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
 Oft till the star, that rose at evening bright,      30  
 Toward Heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel  
 Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,  
 Temper'd to the oaten flute;  
 Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel  
 From the glad sound would not be absent long;  
 And old Damætas loved to hear our song.      36

But O, the heavy change, now thou art gone,  
 Now thou art gone, and never must return !  
 Thee, shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves,  
 With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,  
 And all their echoes, mourn :      41  
 The willows and the hazel copses green  
 Shall now no more be seen  
 Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.  
 As killing as the canker to the rose,      45  
 Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,  
 Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,  
 When first the white-thorn blows;  
 Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear.

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep  
 Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?      50

For neither were ye playing on the steep  
 Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,  
 Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,  
 Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream :

Ay me! I fondly dream —

56

Had ye been there — for what could that have done ?  
 What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,  
 The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,  
 Whom universal Nature did lament,

60

When by the rout that made the hideous roar  
 His gory visage down the stream was sent,  
 Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore ?

Alas ! what boots it with unceasant care  
 To tend the homely, slighted, shepherd's trade,  
 And strictly meditate the thankless Muse ?

66

Were it not better done, as others use,  
 To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
 Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair ?

69

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
 (That last infirmity of noble mind)

To scorn delights, and live laborious days ;  
 But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,  
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,

74

Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears  
 And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"  
 Phœbus replied, and touch'd my trembling ears ;  
 "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil."  
 Nor in the glistening foil

79

"Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies ;

But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes  
 And perfect witness of all-judging Jove ;  
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
 Of so much fame in Heaven expect thy meed," 84

O fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd flood,  
 Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,  
 That strain I heard was of a higher mood :  
 But now my oat proceeds,  
 And listens to the herald of the sea  
 That came in Neptune's plea : 90  
 He ask'd the waves, and ask'd the felon winds,  
 What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain ?  
 And question'd every gust of rugged wings  
 That blows from off each beaked promontory :  
 They knew not of his story ; 95  
 And sage Hippotades their answer brings,  
 That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd ;  
 The air was calm, and on the level brine  
 Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.  
 It was that fatal and perfidious bark  
 Built in the eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark, 100  
 That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,  
 His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,  
 Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge 105  
 Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe :  
 "Ah ! Who hath reft,' quoth he, 'my dearest pledge?'  
 Last came, and last did go,

The pilot of the Galilean lake ;  
 Two massy keys he bore of metals twain                    110  
 (The golden opes, the iron shuts amain);  
 He shook his mitered locks, and stern bespake :  
 "How well could I have spared for thee, young Swain,  
 Enoe of such as for their bellies' sake  
 Creep and intrude and climb into the fold !                115  
 Of other care they little reckoning make,  
 Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,  
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.  
 Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
 A sheep-hook, or have learn'd aught else the least  
 That to the faithful herdman's art belongs !                121  
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;  
 And when they list, their lean and flashy songs,  
 Grate on their scannel pipes of wretched straw ;  
 The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,                125  
 But, swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw  
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread :  
 Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw  
 Daily devours apace, and nothing said :  
 —But that two-handed Engine at the door                130  
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."

Return, Alpheus, the dread Voice is past,  
 That shrunk thy streams ; return, Sicilian Muse,  
 And call the vales, and bid them hither cast.  
 Their bells, and flowerets of a thousand hues.                135  
 Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use

Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,  
 On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,  
 Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes      139  
 That on the green turf suck the honey'd showers,  
 And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.  
 Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies.  
 The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,  
 The white pink, and the pansy freak'd with jet,  
 The glowing violet,      145  
 The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,  
 With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,  
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:  
 Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed.  
 And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,      150  
 To strew the laureat hearse where Lycid lies,  
 For, so to interpose a little ease,  
 Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise;  
 Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas  
 Wash far away,—where'er thy bones are hurl'd,  
 Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,  
 Where thou perhaps, under the whelming tide,      156  
 Visitest the bottom of the monstrous world;  
 Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,  
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
 Where the great Vision of the guarded mount      160  
 Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold,  
 —Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth;  
 And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth?  
 Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more, 165

For Lycidas, your sorrow is not dead,  
 Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor;  
 So sinks the Day-star in the ocean bed,  
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
 And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore   170  
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
 So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
 Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves;  
 Where, other groves, and other streams along,  
 With neotar pure his oozy locks he laves,  
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
 In the blest kingdoms meek of Joy and Love.  
*There entertain him all the Saints Above,*  
 In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
 That sing and, singing, in their glory move,   180  
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;  
 Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,  
 In thy large recompence, and shalt be good  
 To all that wander in that per'lous flood.

Thus sang the uncouth swain to th' oaks and rills,  
 While the still Morn went out with sandals gray;  
 He touched the tender stops of various quills,  
 With eager thought warbling his Doric lay:  
 And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,   190  
 And now was dropped into the western day.  
 At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:  
 To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

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## LYCIDAS

### NOTES.

Lycidas—in giving this pastoral name to his friend, Milton probably had in mind a poet and shepherd mentioned in the ninth Eclogue of Virgil. The name is found in Theocritus also. Milton added the following substitute to the poem : "In this Monody the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drown'd in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion foretells the ruine of our corrupted clergie then in their height." The last sentence was added in the edition of 1645. Monody—is a mournful ode or poem in which a single mourner bewails. The learned friend was Edward King, a close friend and college-fellow of Milton's. By occasion—incidentally. Clergie at the height of power—under Laud's supremacy the clergymen had attained a very great influence.

I-14. Introduction to the subject. The shepherd-poet is constrained to invoke the laurels, the myrtles, and the evergreen ivy, which typify poetic inspiration, because Lycidas, who was himself a poet, is dead ere his prime.

1. Yet once more—Milton's original intention after he had published *Comus* in 1634 was to write no more poetry until his powers had attained maturity. But his friend's death forced him to compose verses. Once more—does not refer to 'poems on like occasions', because a short time before writing *Lycidas* he had mourned the loss of his infant niece

in *Ode on the death of a Fair Infant* (1626), and had written *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester* (1631). The meaning 'once more I am forced to lament an untimely death' is not generally accepted.

**O ye laurels.**—Among the Greeks and Romans, successful poets were crowned with garland of laurel or ivy leaves. Laurel was sacred to Apollo and so its wreath was the poet's reward.

2. **Myrtles**—an evergreen shrub regarded sacred to Venus, as ivy was to Bacchus. **Brown**—dark; dusky. There is a touch of brown in the green of the myrtle leaf. **Never-sere**—evergreen. **Sere** or **Sear**—means dry or withered, as in *Macbeth*—'My way of life'—Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf' (v. 3). **Laurels, Myrtles, and Ivy**—all have classical association with song and poetry. The poet will make a wreath of evergreens to crown the dead poet. By mentioning the evergreens, the symbol of immortality, Milton seems to refer to the immortal fame which his poem will confer on Edward King. It is a mistake to suppose that the poet refers to the classical learning of his departed friend.

3. **I come . . . crude**—'I come to make a poet's garland for myself, i. e., to write a poem' (Bell). **Harsh and crude**—acrid and unripe, because plucked immaturely. The latin *crudus* means raw, uncooked, unripened. This refers to his own immature poetic powers rather than to the untimely death of his friend. Milton also intends the epithets to be applied to himself, since he believed that 'the mellowing year' of his poetic inspiration had not yet arrived. Thus **berries** and **leaves**—are used both in a literal sense, and also with a metaphorical reference to 'poetical fruit'.

4. **Forc'd**—because compelled by fate. It does not imply that he was unwilling to pay a tribute

to the departed friend. **Fingers rude**—Immature and undeveloped poetic powers. Here the word **rude** seems to mean both 'unskilled' and 'rough'.

5. **Shatter**—It is a doublet of modern 'scatter'; disturb. **Before the....year**—before the advancing year has ripened the berries and caused the leaves to fall. It is true as pointed out by Warton that the mellowing year does not affect the leaves of evergreen laurel, myrtle and ivy. But Milton is not thinking of **leaves**, etc., he only refers to his own poetic powers. The sense is: I pluck your unripe berries and rudely scatter your leaves before the season of mellow fruits. The primary meaning of the opening metaphor when put in simplest words is : 'once more after years of silence, I am writing poetry before my powers are ripe' · **Before** is here a preposition and not conjunction, meaning 'ere his prime'.

6. **Bitter constraint**—painful or dire necessity **And**—due to; arising out of. **Sad occasion dear**—when he has suffered from the grievous loss of his friend. **Dear**—means what makes large demands either on our feeling or on our resources. Hence it means here grieved and intimate. Shakespeare used it of persons or things exciting strong emotion of pleasure or hatred. 'dearest foe' (*Hamlet*, 1. 2) 'dear offences' (*Hen. V. ii*, 2), 'shall not grieve thee dearer than thy death' (*Julius Caesar*). Notice the position of the noun between two adjectives, an imitation of a Greek construction.

7. **Compels**—the verb is singular because two nominatives are regarded as a single subject. **To disturb ... due**—to disturb you before the due season, i. e., the time of maturity. The poet refers to his own undeveloped poetic faculty and its exercise before maturity.

8. Lycidas—see the note on the title. Dead ere . . prime—King was only twenty-five years old when he was drowned. Prime—youth. The repetitions in lines 8-11 produce a pathetic effect.

9. His peer—his equal, or one like himself. He was unique. Lat. *Par* equal. Another poet said of King: 'complete in all things, but in years'.

10. Who would . . Lycidas—every body would willingly sing or pay a tribute to him. The line is imitated from Virgil. Compare *Comus* 50 'who knows not Circe?' He knew—He knew how, was able to.'

11. Himself to sing—King himself was a poet. Build the lofty rhyme—another classical phrase for writing lofty verses. Masson has been able to trace only a few pieces of Latin Verse by King. The remark is a poetic exaggeration to increase the pathos of his friend's death. 'To build' refers to the regular structure of the verse, and has its analogy in Horace's '*Condere Carm'n*' 'to build up a song.' Compare Tennyson's adaptation in *Oenone* :—

"Hear me, for I will speak, and build up all  
My sorrow with my song."

12. Bier—what bears a dead body. Wat'ry bier is the grave in the ocean.

13. Unwept—unmourned because his body could not be recovered. Welter—to roll about as in some unstable fluid: be tossed to and fro. To—driven by or in accordance with; at the mercy of. Parching—generally used of the effect of the sun, but used by Milton of the shrivelling effect of frost or cold wind. See *Paradise Lost* II, 594: 'The parching air burns frere etc.'

14. **Meed**—recompense; reward; tribute  
**Melodious tear**—musical dirge or elegy. Song of such mournful character as to cause tears. Spenser called his elegy on Sir Philip Sidney “Tears of the Muses.” This line is often imitated.

15-22. The poet invokes the aid of the Muses. He says, ‘Muses, sing loudly: may ye inspire some one to sing for me likewise when I am gone.

15. **Sisters of the sacred well**—the nine Muses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne in Greek mythology. Their regular abode was on Olympus, but they visited Helicon occasionally. They inspired poets to write and were invoked for successful compositions. Their names and attributes were: Clio, history; Euterpe, lyric poetry; Thalia, comedy; Melpomene, tragedy; Terpsichore, dance; Erato, erotic poetry; Polymnia, religious song; Urania, astronomy; Calliope, epic poetry. **The sacred well**—is the fountain Aganippe on Mt. Helicon, or it may be the Pierian fount of Olympus. **Well**—spring.

16. **The seat of Jove**—it is the altar on Mt. Helicon dedicated to Jove. It may also mean Olympus, which was the abode of gods and at the foot of which was the Pierian fountain.

17. **Begin**—your music **Some what . . . string**—strike the lyre boldly. The poet means ‘let not my song be a tame or feeble one; let it be in the highest possible strain as befits the occasion.’

18. **Hence with excuse**—let there be no hesitation or excuse on this occasion. **Hence with**—away with. **Coy**—hesitating; now used more in the sense of ‘shy’ or ‘bashful.’

19. **So may . . . Muse**—‘as the Muses enable me to lament my lost friend, so may some noble poet

honour my memory when I am dead.' So—even as I do now. Gentle,—noble, as in Chaucer. It may also mean 'kind' and 'sympathetic.' Muse—here it is used for 'poet' inspired by the Muse, as in Spenser and Dryden, etc.

20. Lucky words—'words that wish me good luck : wish it may be well with me.' My destin'd urn—The tomb I am to lie in. Urn—among the Romans was the vessel in which they used to keep the ashes of their dead; Milton uses it in the sense of tomb. Favour—bless. The whole line means: 'Say gracious words of good omen as he passes the urn that is to hold my dust.'

21. As he passes—when he passes by my grave. Turn—may turn and stop before it.

22. Bid fair peace—pray that I may enjoy peace in death. Sable shroud—dark tomb. Shroud—literally means a 'winding-sheet,' but here it means the tomb. The word 'shroud' shows that 'urn' also implies 'tomb.'

23-36. The poet describes his personal relations with Lycidas, their companionship at college, their pleasures and pursuits.

23. For—gives the reason for composing the poem. Connect it with line 18. Nursed... hill—Milton and King were the members of the same college, i. e., Christ's College, Cambridge. The idea has been expressed in pastoral phraseology.

24. Fed the same flock—were the companions in study. Employed themselves in the same pursuits. Fountain ... rill—different parts of the country in the neighbourhood of Cambridge.

25. **High lawns**—upland, treeless open spaces;  
**Grassy glades**—Comp. ‘Upland lawn’ in Gray’s  
*Elegy*—(St. 7).

26. **The opening . . . morn**—at the dawn. “When the morning was, as it were, opening her eyes, and letting out their light” (Keightley). Todd has traced the expression to *Job*—III, 9. where for *dawning of the day*—the margin proposes *eyelids of the morning*. Milton himself was a very early riser. Comp. ‘the grey-eyed morn’ *Romeo and Juliet*—II, iii, 1). This beautiful phrase has been borrowed by many poets, e.g., Marlowe, Sylvester, Tennyson. The suggestion may have come from the marginal rendering of *Job*—(iii, 9.) but the picture of morn opening her eyes upon the upland fields is Milton’s own.

27. **We drove afield**—we drove our flocks into the fields. Cf. Gray’s *Elegy*—St. vii. The simple meaning is that they studied together. **Afield**—on field, ‘a’ being corruption of ‘on’. “Here we have a whole day divided into morn, noon, and eve. We drove our flocks to the field ere the dawn, heard the buzz of the trumpet-fly in the noon-tide heat, and fed our flocks together till dewy eve” (Bradshaw). This is pastoral language for ‘we studied together and spent the whole day in each other’s company.

28. **What time**—at the time when. A Latinism.  
**The gray fly . . . horn**—the humming of the trumpet-fly which is heard at noon. The gray-fly or the trumpet-fly makes harsh buzzing sound. **Winds the horn**—hums or buzzes. The ‘horn’ is called ‘sultry’ as it is at noon or the hottest part of the day that this fly hums. The whole line simply, means ‘at noon, when the fly is heard humming.’ Cf. ‘Where the beetle winds his small but sullen ‘horn,’ Collins’s *Ode to Evening*.

29. Batt'ning—feeding, fattening. It is more correct as an intransitive verb, 'growing fat,' but here it is used transitively. With—at the time of. This indicates evening.

30. The star that rose—it is rightly objected that the evening star does not 'rise' but appears. Such inaccuracies do exist in Milton but they are neither so many nor so blunt as we find in Pope or Dryden. Milton originally wrote:—

"Oft till the ev'n-starre bright."

31. Toward ... descent—to-wards the western horizon. Descent—slope or inclination. Had sloped ... wheel—was about to set in the west. Westering—moving towards the west. Wheel—career. The idea is taken from a carriage going down a slope. When the evening star is about to set it is time for the shepherd to shut the flock in the fold.

32. Rural ditties .. mute—the shepherds sang songs also and enjoyed music together. The reference is to their early poetic efforts which were appreciated by their college-fellows and tutors. Ditty—originally meant the *words*—and not the *tunes* of a song, now they mean love poems.

33. Temper'd—modulated, attuned; "set." Th' oaten flute—the flute made of oat-straw, used by Roman shepherds. Oaten—made of oat straw. The oaten-flute or reed-pipe is a favourite instrument in pastoral poetry. Cf. "When shepherds pipe an oaten straw" (Shakes: *Love's Labour Lost*). The line is to be scanned thus:—

'Tempered | to th' oa- | ten flute.

34. Satyrs....Fauns—a pastoral reference to the undergraduates of Milton's time. Satyrs—(Greek) and Fauns—(Roman), merry rural deities not clearly

distinguished by ancient writers. They were imagined as having human forms but with traces of the goat in horns or ears or cloven heel. They form a part of the stock of writers of pastoral poetry and represent the luxuriant power of nature. Rough-boisterous and inclined to riotous merriment.

35. Would . . . long—even they admired Lycidas and his songs.

36. **Old Damoetas**—a Greek shepherd's name taken from Theocritus; it also occurs in Sidney's *Arcadia*. It is a common name in pastoral writers and perhaps here it refers to W.Chappell, Milton's tutor. Masson notes that 'old' is a favourite word with Milton implying compliment.

37-49. Milton gives direct expression to his grief in these lines. 'Thou art gone, and nature laments thee: thy loss is like a blight to thy fellow shepherds.' The paucity of rhyme in these lines is also noticeable.

37. **The heavy change**—the loss of Lycidas which is hard to endure. **Heavy**—sad. **Now that**—seeing that. Cf. :—

"But, of the heavy change! bereft  
Of health, strength, friends and kindred"

(Wordsworth ; *Simon Lee*.)

38. **Now thou art gone**—the repetition is pathetic. **Never must return**—'art fated never to return.' The construction is 'must never return.'

39-41. **Thee the woods . . . mourn**—the construction is: 'The woods overgrown with wild thyme, and the gadding vine, and the caves with all their echoes, mourn thee.' The device of making woods,

caves, and their echoes mourn for Lycidas is borrowed from Greek models. **Thyme**—a wild aromatic grass. **Gadding**—straying in luxuriant growth. ‘Envy is a gadding passion’ (Bacon). **Echoes**—personified here. Cf. Shelley in *Adonais* (St. 15)—

‘Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,  
And feeds her grief ‘with his remembered lay.’

*Mourn* governs ‘thee’

42. **Hazel-copse**—‘copse’ is derived from a French word which means ‘a wood that is periodically cut’. English copses are chiefly composed of hazel.

44. **Fauning . . . . lays**—leaves which moved to and fro, like a fan, and showed as if they felt joy at thy sweet songs, will move no more. They will wear a gloomy aspect. **To**—driven by or in accompaniment with. Nature is shown here in sympathy with man or affected by human emotions. This is an instance of ‘pathetic fallacy’.

45. **Killing**—destructive, fatal. When applied to shepherds it means ‘dreadful.’ **Canker**—The cankerworm, a sort of caterpillar that eats into the buds of roses. Cf.

“The canker galls the infants of the spring,  
Too oft before their buttons are disclosed.”  
(*Hamlet* I. 3).

**Canker**—originally the same word with ‘cancer.’

46. **Faint-worm**—it is not certain what particular worm Milton refers to; it must be some that causes disease in sheep and cattle. ‘Perhaps it may be ‘a kind of spider, called a tinct, of red colour’ which was erroneously supposed to be a deadly

poison for cows and horses. **Weanling**—newly weaned. ‘To wean’ means primarily ‘to accustom to do without anything.’ Hence the expression means ‘herds or young ones that can now do without their mother ; that have given up sucking and begun to graze.

47. **Gay wardrobe**—bright and varied colours. ‘Wardrobe’ is properly a closet for robes and not clothes themselves. Note the condensed expressiveness.

48. **When first....blows**—the obvious way of pointing to the spring time. **White thorn**—haw-thorn or May blossom. **Blows**—blossoms or flowers.

49. **Such**—so ‘killing’ or dreadful. **To shepherd’s ears**—when his friend got the news of his death.

50-63. The poet addresses the Nymphs and asks where they were when Lycidas was drowned. Why could not they save him from drowning? But they could not once save Orpheus. This form of address Milton has imitated partly from Theocritus and partly from Virgil.

50. **Nymphs**—guardian spirits; mythological female deities who presided over fountains, rivers, seas, mountains and groves. It is a mistake to confound them here with the Muses. Imitated from Theocritus. **Remorselees deep**—pitiless sea.

51. **Lov’d Lycidas**—Lycidas whom you loved because he was a lover of natural beauty and wrote pastoral poetry.

52. **The steep**—Hales, Keightley and others think that Peumaenmur, which overhangs the sea, opposite Anglesea, is suggested. According to Richardson, the reference is to the hill Kerig-y-Druid-

ion in Denbighshire, mentioned in Camden's *Britannia* as a burial-place of the Druids. In any case it must be some Welsh mountain, overlooking the Irish seas.

53. **Druuids**—they were priests of the Old Celtic races of Gaul, Britain and Ireland. They were priests in their religious, and bards in their poetic character. The oak was the symbol of the Supreme Being for them and their religion was made up of nature worship and symbolism. **Lie**—lie buried, and where their graves are.

54. **Shaggy top**—thickly wooded. It refers to the old graves and high places of the Druids. **Mona**—The isle of Anglesey. It is a mistake to confuse it with the Isle of Man. Tacitus speaks of it as covered with forest, and that it was famed for the oak groves of the Druids. Mona is frequently described as the nursing mother of Wales, in allusion to its old fertility or to its being the residence of the Druids.

55. **Deva**—The river Dee. 'Deva' is its ancient name and Tennyson calls it "the sacred Dee." It forms the boundary between England and Wales, and it was supposed to intimate good and evil to the two countries by shifting its course. That country had the worse in any encounters to which the stream drew nearer. Drayton calls it 'hallowed' and Spenser 'Divine.' **Her wizard stream**—Merlin the great enchanter used to haunt the valleys of the Dee, according to the *Faerie Queene*—i, 9, 4. Wizard literally meant a wise person. Here the word is not used in a bad sense.

56. **Ay me**—Alas. I fondly dream—I foolishly hope. The poet suddenly realises the futility of his imaginings, and so his eloquence is abruptly checked.

57. Had ye been there—these words embody his dream that if the Nymphs had been there they would have averted the catastrophe. Supply the words—'ye might have saved Lycidas.' For—The word 'for' depends on 'fondly.' The construction being—I dream, Had ye been....! But I dream fondly, for what....?

58. Could—could do. The Muse—Calliope, who was supposed to preside over Epic poetry, and was reputed to be the mother of Orpheus. **Orpheus**—the story of Orpheus is taken from Virgil's 4th *Georgic* and it was a favourite allusion with the 16th and 17th century poets. Orpheus was the son of Oeagrus and Calliope, and had a lyre given to him by Apollo. He played upon it so exquisitely that all things inanimate as well as animate were charmed. He married Eurydice and when she died of snake-bite, he followed her to Hades and so charmed Pluto that he allowed his wife to accompany him back to earth on condition that he did not look upon her until the borders of Hades had been passed. The temptation was too great; he looked and lost her for ever. In grief of her he spurned the Thracian women, who tore him to pieces and threw his head into the Hebrus. The head was washed ashore on Lesbos but "the cold tongue even called on Eurydice." In Lesbos his burial place was shown in later ages. Milton refers to the story in *Paradise Lost* also. See VII. 32-38. There too we have, "nor could the Muse defend her son."

59. Enchanting son—Orpheus whose music on the lyre could enchant all and everything. Enchanting means both 'charming' and 'delightful.'

60. Universal nature—both animate and inanimate. Whom—whose loss.

61. **Rout**—Disorderly crowd of the Thracian women who tore Orpheus to pieces. **That mode.... roar**—The wild outcry. The women were in the midst of their Bacchic revelries when they tore Orpheus to pieces.

62. **Gory visage**—head covered with clots of blood. **Visage**—here means head and not the face only. **The stream**—the Hebrus, the principal river of Thrace.

63. **Lesbian shore**—Across the Aeglian sea to the shore of the island of Lesbos, where the head of Orpheus was washed ashore.

64-84. The poet says:—"Of what good is it (in these days) to undergo the high and strict discipline which befits a man for the vocation of a poet when true poetry is slighted? Would it not be better to spend time in trifles as others do." The poet's task is a thankless one, because earthly fame is uncertain. But the reward of a pure and noble life comes hereafter. This is the first digression in a higher mood. The following note by Prof. Hales is important. "Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Massinger, and other bright lights of the Elizabethan age, had for some years passed away. The last representative of that great race—Ben Jonson—had just been gathered to his fellows. The race of poet's which had succeeded were of a different breed. The dramatic period was over. There arose a tribe of light lyric poets—Herrick, Suckling, Donne, Lovelace, Wilter. It is easy to understand how, to one of Milton's high poetic theory and purpose, the popularity of these triflers must have suggested despair for himself and for his time."

64. **What boots it**—of what advantage is it. **Boot**—comes from A. S. *bot*, profits remedy compensation.

[It survives in the adjective bootless', profitless, and in the Phrase 'to boot.' The general idea is 'what is the use of being a poet in these times, when true poetry is slighted and neglected?' **Unceasant care.**—Incessant application to study, and preparation for the poet's calling.

65. **To tend ... trade**—the poet's calling described in pastoral. Apply ourself to poetry. Milton compares the light lyrical poets of his time with the great Elizabethan dramatists who had now passed away.

66. **Strictly meditate**—with great self-denial and devotion pursue the art of writing poetry. **Meditates**—practise. Virgil's expression is translated in English. **Thankless Muse**—the writing of poetry which brings no reward. The Muse giving no thanks to her votaries. High poetry was not appreciated in those days.

67. **Were it not done**—would it not be better or wiser! **Others**—Milton's contemporary poets, e.g. Herrick, and Suckling. **Use**—Are wont; are accustomed to do. This use in the present is now obsolete.

68. **To port with**—dally with. Why write high poetry and not amatory verses? **Amaryllis**—Milton chooses names associated with pastoral verse. *Amaryllis* and *Neaera* are traditional names of shepherdesses in Theocritus and Virgil.

69. **Tangles**—locks. Warton thinks Milton refers to certain poems of Bhuchanan addressed to *Amaryllis*—and *Neaera*—which were well-known at this time' (*Hales*). Milton not only means love-making but writing of erotic verses like those of Herrick and others.

70-72. This is one of the most frequently quoted passages in the entire poem. The love of fame—the last weakness even wise men put off—incites noble hearts to set light by all earthly enjoyments.

70. Spur that doth raise—the high incentive that leads. Clear spirit—the man of pure soul and noble aims, purged of the grosser passions and worldly desires. Pure, here means free from the taint of worldliness' (*Verity*). Compare—

"Due praise, that is the spur of doing well;"  
(Spenser: *Tears of the Muses*).

"But all these spurs to virtue, seeds of praise."  
(Ben Jonson : *Prince Henry's Barriers*).

It is interesting to note that Shelley borrowed 'clear spirit' from Milton and fittingly described him in the same words—

"His clear sprite,  
Yet reigns o'er earth, the third among the sons  
of light." (*Adonais*.)

71. That last . . . mind—the idea has been taken by Milton from Tacitus—"the desire of fame is the last (*desire*) cast off by the wise." Sir Henry Wotton wrote of James I.—

"I will not deny his appetite for glory, which generous minds do ever latest part from." That—well-known.

72. To scorn . days—an apt description of Milton's life at Horton where the line was written. Delights—personal or physical comforts.

73-76. 'When we hope to find the fair reward of living laborious days—viz. popularity—death comes and puts an end to our life.'

73. **Guerdon**—reward, that is, Fame. Generally derived from *Widardonum*—a compound of Old German and Latin meaning a ‘return gift.’

74. **Think**—Hope. **Blaze**—the word is used for Fame suddenly making your name shine in glory. Flash of glory. ‘For what is glory but the blaze of fame?’ (*Paradise Regained iii 47*).

75. **The blind Fury**—*Atropos* one of the Fates. The Fates, three in number, *Clotho*, *Lachesis* and *Atropos*, were powerful goddesses who ruled over the birth and life of men. *Clotho* holds the distaff; *Lachesis*, spins the thread, and *Atropos* cuts the thread of life. She is called ‘blind’ because she is reckless and indifferent as to whom she strikes. Milton calls *Atropos* one of the Furies but she is one of the Fates. He was too good a classical scholar to confuse the three Fates with the three Furies (*Tisiphone*, *Megara*, *Allecto*). It seems that Milton called *Atropos* a Fury in a general sense or in indignation because she cruelly cut off King’s life in his prime. **Abhorred shears** the hateful scythe with which she cuts the thread of life.

76. **Slits the... life** Cuts off frail human life, **Life**—the thread of life. **Thin spun**—because human life is so frail. **Slit**—to cut across or in two. It also meant to cut lengthwise. ‘**But not the praise**’—*Atropos* may cut short life but it cannot cut praise. Man may die but his fame remains in the world. The woods have been so disposed as to give the sense of a quick repartee. **But not**—but doth not slit the praise.

77. **Phoebus**—Apollo, the god of song and music. ‘He was the patron of poets. **Touch’d my**

.....ears—touching a person's ear was a symbolical way of reminding him of a thing, the ear being regarded as the seat of memory. It was the established mode of summoning a witness, as we find in Horace. Trembling ears—There is a superstition that when we feel a tingling sensation in the ear, it indicates that some people are talking of us. Milton feels the tingling suggesting that his praise would survive his life. Milton makes a fine use of a popular superstition.

78-84. Fame is not to be found on this earth. It is not mere loud rumour. It comes from God to those who become heirs of heavenly life.

78. 'Fame is no... soil'—fame is not of this world: it belongs to the life after death. Mortal soil—The earth. That is during man's life time. It is a poetic way of saying that anything associated with The earth is bound to die, it is mortal. Fame is immortal.

79. Glistening foil—shining or bright sheet of metal put under precious stones to increase their lustre. Tinfoil or tinsel. Glister—glitter. The construction is—"Nor is fame set in etc.

80. Set off—shown to an advantage; displayed. Set off agrees with 'foil,' not with 'fame'. The lines 78-80 have been explained as under :—

"True fame does not lie in the dazzling appearance of success which man presents to society, nor has it aught to do with popular applause and report. Rather it is a thing 'spiritual and unworldly in its essence.'

'Fame lies not in the gaudy tinsel, displayed to the world, of earthly honour, nor yet in being widely talked about.' (*Elton*).

'Fame does not consist in the false lustre displayed to the world, or in widespread rumour.' (*Storr*).

**Broad**—widely circulated. Compare—

'What's fame, a fancied life in other's breath?'  
 (Pope : *Essay on Man*).

81. **Lives and spreads**—because Fame is compared to a plant. **Aloft**—high. **By**—by means of. Prof. Elton—"By virtue of: possibly, in presence of." But this does not agree with 'witness,' though it fits well with 'eyes.'

82. **All judging Jove**—the great God who weighs every one in the same balance and judges all impartially. *Jove* and *Apollo* the Christian and classical names are blended together, Dr. Johnson reproves Milton for the mixture. Milton saw no incongruity in such blending of classical mythology and Christian faith. The main idea is:—"Fame draws its very life from the ultimate approval of the all-righteous judge" (*Storr*). God is the 'perfect judge' because nothing escapes His eye and He is infallible in his discrimination. God's judgment alone confers true fame.

83. **Lastly**—finally. From His decision there is no appeal, of course.

84. **Of so much . . . meed**—expect to get as thy reward so much fame in heaven.' **Meed**—reward or recompense.

85-102. The poet returns to the main theme and to the pastoral strain. 'Back to my pastoral mood!

Triton asked the elements why Lycidas was drowned, and the answer was that the sea was calm and the ill-boding ship was answerable.

85. Arethuse—a famous fountain in the island of Ortygia near Syracuse. It is invoked here because it was regarded by the ancient poets as the fount of the pastoral muses, and because Theocritus lived there. Honour'd flood—the river Minicus is 'honoured' because associated with Virgil.

86. Minicus. A river in northern Italy which falls into the Po near Mantua, where poet Virgil was born. Milton mentions Arethuse and Minicus to typify the pastoral poetry of Greece as well as Italy. By mentioning the two great pastoral poets Milton seems to apologise for his digression on Fame which was not in keeping with the pastoral spirit. Smooth-sliding—rapidly flowing. Crown'd with reed—an epithet taken from Virgil. On whose banks poets were born, alluding specially to Virgil. Vocal—musical.

87. That strain—the voice of Phoebus or Apollo. See lines 78—84. Mood—character, style. It is a musical term meaning strain ('mode, manner, modus'). It is not to be confused with 'mood' meaning 'disposition.'

The line means:—The speech of Phoebus had been a burst beyond the simple mood of the pastoral proper to which he now returns. The 'manner' or 'tone' of Phoebus was loftier, more dignified than that of what had preceded—the shepherds piping on his oaten flute.

88. My oat—my reed pipe or pastoral strain. See L 33. 'oaten flute'. The instrument stands for the poet. Proceeds—is resumed after the digression. 'Note the boldness and complexity of the

metaphor. The material the 'oat' is put for the instrument the pipe which accompanies the song, the 'pipe' for the song itself, and the song for the muse, the song-maker, who is presented as 'listening,' and this finally is made equivalent to the actual singing of what was seen or heard, so as to secure a rare vividness and vigour.'

89. **Herald of the sea**—Triton, the herald of Neptune, god of the sea who is here represented as being sent by his master to plead for his innocence in the matter of Lycidas' death, and the cause of the shipwreck. Triton is the son and trumpeter of Neptune, represented as blowing a horn or couch in order to still the waves of the sea, and having a fish-tail instead of legs.

90. **In Neptune's plea**—came to clear Neptune of the charge of having caused Lycidas' death. **Plea**—defence or excuse. **Neptune**—Greek Poseidon, was the son of Saturn and Rhea and brother of Jupiter and Pluto. He was the king of the sea and also god of horses. He is usually represented with a trident in his hand and being drawn across the sea in a chariot of brazen-hoofed horses, attended by tritons and nymphs.

91. **Felon**—cruel, wicked and merciless, because presumed to be guilty of the death of Lycidas and the occasion of so many misfortunes. 'Guilty and put upon their trial.' From the adjective 'fell' (Celtic word 'fall,' bad.)

92. **Hard mishap . . . doom'd**—the unfortunate circumstances which led to the condemnation of, or caused the death of. **Gentle swain**—gentle shepherd. 'Gentle' presumes innocence on the part of the condemned shepherd. This line is the indirect report of the question which Triton is supposed to put to the winds and waves.

93. Every gust of rugged wings—every rough or violent gust of wind. Rugged wings—rough blasts. 'Every harsh-winged gust.' Rugged applies to 'gust.'

94. Each waked promontary—each pointed cape or sharp projecting headland. 'Beaked'—'projecting like a beak.' Mark the appropriateness and picturesque effects of adjectives.—'felon,' 'beaked' and 'rugged.'

95. They knew . . . story—the winds being absent from the scene of disaster knew nothing of the death of Lycidas

96. Sage Hippotades—Aeolus, son of Hippotes, the ruler of the winds, who held the winds confined in a cave. He is called 'sage' because he kept them under proper control. The suffix *ades* means 'son of.' Their -of the winds.

97. His dungeon—this line gives the answer of the winds which Hippotades brings. Aeolus was said to keep the winds chained up in a cave. His—the dungeon in charge of Aeolus. Was strayed—had strayed. Escaped from the prison without being noticed and thus brought about havoc specially to ships. Milton means to say that the sea was perfectly calm when the ship carrying Edward King was wrecked. But the real fact is that there was a storm which caused the shipwreck. There is the testimony of King's own brother on this point. Either Milton was not correctly informed of all the circumstances of the shipwreck, or for poetic effect and in order to make the circumstances of death more pathetic, he intentionally emphasised the calmness of the sea.

98. The level brine—the calm and smooth sea.

99. **Sleek Panope with all her sisters**—Panope was one of the fifty daughters of Nereus. Nereus was a sea deity, son of Oceanus and Terra, and husband of Doris, by whom he had fifty daughters called Nereides. He was gifted with prophecy, and lived in the Aegean Sea. Panope, one of the Nereides is described as playing with her sisters on the smooth sea. If the sea had not been calm Nereides would not have been enjoying their sport there. **Sleek**—smooth. The word is generally applied to things and not to persons. Here it means 'smooth and shining with the water, like a seal' (*Elton*).

100. **Fatal and perfidious bark**—the doomed ship, ill-fated and treacherous, in which King sailed. **Perfidious**—because it went down in a calm sea.

101. **Built in th' eclipse**—‘Eclipses were believed, both in the ancient and in later ages, to be times of evil omen, and to bring a curse upon everything done during them. They were supposed to be caused by the spiteful power of witches. (*Hales*). The ship was unseaworthy because built in an ominous time when an eclipse was taking place. Compare *Macbeth*. IV. I. 271:—‘Slips of yew Silvered in the moon’s eclipse’. **Rigg’d with curses dark**—the meaning will change according to the sense of ‘with.’ If ‘with’ means ‘along with’ or ‘in the midst of’ the phrase would mean—‘the ship was rigged in the midst of dark curses *i. e.*, when ill-boding curses were being uttered by the witches.’ If ‘with’ has an instrumental sense, then by a bold metaphor the phrase may mean:—‘rigged with curses along with the necessary ropes, etc.’ **To rig a ship**—is to fit out with the necessary tackle, ropes, sails etc. **Dark**—foul. So the responsibility of bringing about the disaster of shipwreck is of the ill-starred ship and not of the winds or waves.

102. That sacred head of them—Edward King whose life was so valuable. Sacred,—‘sanctified from harm, inviolable and reverend’ (*Elton*). King’s life was sacred either because it was dedicated to the service of the Muses or because it was consecrated by friendship. Bell’s meaning ‘devoted to death’ does not seem to be clear.

103-107. Camus, the god of the river of Lycidas (representing Cambridge University) comes mourning the loss of Lycidas and asks who has slain his dearest son. “The genius of the Cam river and of Cambridge University was naturally of the mourners for Lycidas. He comes attired in a mantle of the hairy river-weed that floats down the Cam, his bonnet of the sedge of that river, which exhibits especially when dried, peculiar markings, something like the Ai Ai (alas! alas!) which the Greeks detected on the leaves of the Hyacinth, in token of the sad death of the Spartan youth from whose blood the flower had sprung” (*Masson*).

103. Camus—the river Cam, here representing the Cambridge University. Milton personifies the river Cam, near Cambridge. In the classical and Renaissance literature rivers were often personified. Reverend sire—this address for the ancient University is quite appropriate as ‘Father Tiber.’ The University of Cambridge was probably founded in the reign of Henry III although as a seat of learning it was known in 916. Went footing slow—came slowly, sorrow and age bearing him down. ‘Went’ simply means ‘went along.’ The Cam is also noted for its sluggish stream.

104. His mantle hairy—River-gods in ancient art were represented as decked with the vegetation that grew by the river bank. Here the reference is

to the rushes and reeds growing along the banks of the Cam. **Hairy**—shaggy. **His bonnet sedge**—his head-dress was made of sedge. ‘Sedge’ is used adjectively here. ‘Bonnet’ was formerly used for man’s head-dress as well. Now it is used for women’s cap. **Sedge**—a kind of grass or water-flag which grows plentifully in the river.

105. **Inwrought dim**—the meaning of this phrase is not clear and no satisfactory explanation has been given. Warburton is of opinion that it refers to “the fabulous traditions of the high antiquity of Cambridge.” Some think that Milton alludes to the indistinct, dusky streaks, and a variety of dotted marks which appear on sedge leaves when dried. “Probably by ‘figures dim’ are meant-symbolical devices and representations worked in embroidery; they may have had reference to the history of Cambridge University” (*Verity*). **Inwrought**—marked, embroidered

106. **Sanguine flower**—the hyacinth. Hyacinthus was a Spartan prince whom Apollo loved but whom he slew by mistake. While Hyacinthus was playing at quoits he was killed by the discus of the god, and from his blood sprang up a flower which bore on its petals the Greek latters (*AI, AI, Alas, ! Alas, !*) Ovid tells the story in *Metamorphoses X*. **Inscribed with woe**—‘the edge of the ‘sedge bonnet’ is inscribed with woe like the edge of that sanguine flower.’ The reeds of Camus are branded with grief for Lycidas, as the flower of Apollo is branded with grief for Hyacinthus. **Sanguine**—bloody: having come the blood drops.

107. **Reft**—forcibly taken away from me; stolen away; robbed me of. **Dearest pledge**—Dearest child. ‘Pledge’ is here used in the sense of *child*—Latin

*pignus*, pledge or security. A child is the security of mutual affection of the parents. King was a promising scholar and had gained reputation at Cambridge.

168-181. 'Lastly St. Peter, as head of the church, mourns the young shepherd, so much better fitted to be a pastor than the self-seekers who had intruded into the church, and whom he proceeds, with lofty indignation, to rebuke and warn for their neglect of their true duties.'

Archbishop Laud was at the height of his power when this passage was written. Though a genuine reformer he insisted too much on outward uniformity and thus alienated many Puritans including Milton. In the opinion of Palgrave *Lycidas* 'suffers by the intrusion of the writer's narrow and violent theological politics.' We cannot agree with this view because Milton has not allowed his poetry to be spoilt by politics. 'It is here that the poem rises to its greatest height of passion. "In the rest of *Lycidas* though passion is genuinely present, yet it is filtered through many rivulets, and we are blinded to the real fulness of the stream: but here it runs in one current, and irresistably." (*Elton*). 'The passage which begins, "last came and last did go," raises in us a thrill of awestruck expectation which I can only compare with that excited by the Cassandra of Aeschylus' *Agememnon*' (*Mark Pattison*). "When Milton felt strongly, he wrote fiercely. The passage is a splendid and fierce cry of wrath, and the rough trumpet note, warlike and unsparing, which it sounds against the unfaithful herdsmen and the 'grim wolf' was to ring louder and louder through the prose works, and finally to clash in the ears of those very Presbyterians whom he now supported." (*Stopford Brooke*). Prof. Elton gives the general idea of

these lines in these words:—"Last came Peter, and sternly said, "Would some of the hireling shepherds had gone, and not thou, Lycidas! They know naught of shepherding: their teaching satisfies not but corrupts the sheep, whom the papal wolf also devours apace. But their doom is at hand." Ruskin in his *Sesame and Lilies* (§ 20—25) has made a beautiful comment of high literary value on this famous passage

109. **The pilot of the Galilean lake**—St. Peter, regarded as the founder of the Roman Catholic Church. Peter was originally a fisherman on the sea of Galilee (*Matt. IV 18-20*), and his name here is suggestive of the fact that Lycidas also perished at sea. **Galilean lake** is Lake Tiberias.

110. **Two massy keys... twain**—St. Peter holds two massive keys one of gold and the other of iron. Compare Mathew XVI, 19, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

In the mediæval times St. Peter was represented as carrying two keys, one of gold and one of silver. Milton substitutes iron for silver, and gives St. Peter the power of shutting heaven and not hell.

111. **The golden opes**—opens the gates of heaven. **Amain**—with force or firmly, as it were with a clang.

112. **Mitr'd locks**—St. Peter is said to be the first bishop of Rome. Wearing on his head the mitre or head-dress of a bishop. He is described *Mitred*—perhaps because he speaks with episcopal authority. **Stern bespake**—spoke indignantly. 'Bespeak' is now only used transitively.

113. **Spared for thee**—given away to save 'thee. In the lines that follow Milton thunders against the

gross abuses of the clergy of the time who cared more for their emoluments, and very little for the spiritual welfare of their flocks. Milton openly declares himself in sympathy with those Puritans who were opposed to Laud's ritualistic reforms and the growing abuse of power by the clergy. We have to remember that Edward King's intention was to be ordained, as it was of Milton at one time.

114. **E**nough—it is said to be the old plural of 'enough.' Milton in one of his sonnets (xiii) writes:—"hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw." Such as—such priests as. Those who care for their emoluments only.

115. **C**reep and intrude and climb—Milton chooses words that distinguish three types of men he has in view—those who enter the Church in a stealthy, underhand way ('creep'), those who thrust themselves in with self-assertion ('intrude'), and those who are full of ambition to climb into high places' (*Verity*). **F**old—the pale of the Anglican Church.

116. **O**f other care ... make—they care very little about matters not concerning their own selfish interests. **C**are—duty. **R**eck'ning—account.

117. **S**cramble—to creep on all fours stealthily. **S**hearer's feast—when wool was cut from the sheep, shepherds used to hold a feast at the end of the season. Here the 'feast' means church endowments at the disposal of the Government.

118. **S**hove away—shut out. Withhold benefits from. Insert 'how to' before 'shove. **T**he worthy bidden guest—the faithful minister who had received a real call to the office and was not a mere hireling. Reference is to the parable of the marriage of the

king's son, *Matt.* xxii, 1-9. **Bidden**—who felt the urge from within to get ordained.

**119. Blind mouths**—this bold expression signifies ignorance and gluttony of the corrupt clergymen. It is a classical idiom used most effectively here. The seeming incongruity disappears if we remember, as Ruskin says, that a 'bishop' means a person who 'sees,' and a 'pastor' means a person who 'feeds,' so that a 'blind mouth' combines both the evils from which a clergyman must be entirely free "The shepherds are emphatically terved *mouths* first for their gluttony, secondly in reference to their preaching... Next by a bold figure of speech the *mouths* are said to *hold a sheep hook*" (*Jerram*). **Mouths**—gluttons. The blindness is, of course, spiritual.

**120. To hold a sheep hook**—how to perform their duties properly. The 'pastoral staff' in the terms of pastoral imagery would be a sheep-hook. It is a hook fastened to a pole by which shepherds lay hold on the legs or necks of their sheep. **Least**—learnt in the least.

**121. Faithful herdman's art**—all that is necessary for the right discharge of the pastor's duty. **Herdman**—shepherd.

**122. What recks it them?**—what do they care? It is an impersonal construction. 'Recks' now survives in 'reckless.' **They are sped**—they are provided for. They have got a living and they cared only for their preferment. **Sped**—is the past participle of the verb '**speed**,' still used in 'God speed you,' meaning God may give you success.

**123. When they list**—only when it pleases them. **List**—choose. **Their lean and flashy songs**—the songs stand here for preaching or religious discourses.

They are 'lean' because they yield no nourishment, that is they are devoid of spiritual significance or sustenance. **Flashy**—according to Dr. Johnson 'showy without substance.' Bacon uses the word in the sense of 'insipid' or 'tasteless.' "Distilled books are, like common distilled waters, *flashy-things*". (*Of Studies*). In old English *flasshe*—means a pool. Milton probably refers to the shallow observances and showy rituals unnecessarily enforced in Laud's time.

124. **Grate**--sound harshly. Produce discordant and harsh sound on the pipes. **Scannel**—thin; feeble; meagre. The word is said to survive in the Lancashire dialect and is used for a lean person. **Scranny**—is a common provincial word for lean' (*Hales*). **Straw**—oat or reed of which the pipe is made. Milton, no doubt, refers not only to the lack of moral worth in the sermons preached but to the want of their artistic finish. The poet is rich in sound pictures. The idea is taken from Virgil:—"to mangle a wretched tune on a grating straw."

125. **The hungry sheep**—the congregations which look up to the priests for spiritual instructions but do not get them. 'Sheep' are the people in charge of a pastor. The sheep neglected by their shepherd is a common idea in pastoral poetry. Compare:—

"No longer leave they wistful flock unfed." (Mathew Arnold: *Gipsy Scholar*).—"had fed themselves and not their flocks," (Milton). Their is a saying of Christ's which seems to have given origin to the idea:—"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the flock." Are not fed—Religious instructions which they desire are not given to them. They are neglected by their 'shepherd' or pastor.

126. **But swoln with wind**—their minds are filled with unscriptural doctrines, or idle and perverse teachings. **The rank mist they draw**—corrupt, poisonous teachings, which corrupt their hearts and thus they ‘rot inwardly.’ **Rank**—un-wholesome or pestilient. **Draw**—inhale; breathe.

127. **Rot inwardly**—poison their very soul. Mental and moral ruin overtakes a people when their teachers are unfaithful. **Foul contagion spread**—corrupt others as well by disseminating false doctrines among them. They not only lead evil lives themselves but become an example for others to follow. Both the lines taken together mean:—“But corrupted with vain and unwholesome doctrines, endanger their own souls, and prove the ruin of others.

128. **Besides what**—while all this injury to the Church is taking place. **What**—all these. **The grim wolf**—the Church of Rome, or the Catholic section of the Established Church. Professor Watson is of opinion that the words refer to Rome or there may be a secondary allusion to the legendary origin of Rome: Romulus after whom the city takes its name, was in his infancy cared for by a wolf. **With privy paw**—secret and underhand methods. Milton refers to the system of proselytism then carried on by the Roman Catholic party in England. The ‘privy paw’ denotes the secrecy with which the Romish priests and Jesuits laboured to make converts” (Storr).

129. **Daily deueurs apace**—refers to the growth of Popery and the large number of converts which were made in Laud’s time to Catholicism. It was a subject of alarm and complaint among the Puritans. **And nothing said**—no protests are heard against

these secretly managed conversions to Roman Catholicism. Milton is naturally angry with the supineness and indifference of the English Church to this danger, as its seriousness was not sufficiently realized. The prelates should have vehemently opposed it. Perhaps the appeal is not made so much against Laud, who endeavoured to stop conversions, but against the indifference of the King, who secretly sympathised with his Roman Catholic Queen. She, no doubt strongly favoured the cause of her own Church. The two lines mean:—"While all this injury to the Church is taking place, there is another source of loss to which the English clergy seem to be indifferent, *viz.* the desertions to the Church of Rome that are so frequent."

130. That two handed-engine at the door—It is a much debated expression and various interpretations and some of the quite acceptable, have been made. There is, however: no doubt about the general meaning of the two lines.

(130 and 131). "The time of retribution is at hand, and that it will be sudden and decisive." The various interpretations which have been given of the expression 'two-handed engine' are given below:—

(1) It may be a variation of the 'sharp two-edged' sword of Revelation i, 16.

(2) The two houses of Parliament may have been referred to, as Masson thinks.

(3) It may refer to the *axe* of the Gospel (Matthew iii, 10) "And now the axe is laid to the root of the tree; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down" (Newton).

(4) It is a definite prophecy by Milton of Laud's execution which actually took place in 1645. And

so the 'two-edged engine' is the axe by which Laud was to lose his head afterwards. This is the opinion of Warton.

(5) 'I would suggest that the sword of Justice is meant' (Verity).

(6) Jerram interprets it in a general way meaning, 'thorough and sweeping reformation' of the Church which did take place some years later. **Two handed**—wielded with both hands. **Engine**—is an elaborately constructed machine. Ety. the same word as 'ingenuity.' **At the door**—the urgent reforms will be irresistible now. Reforms are close at hand.

131. **To smite . . . more**—the reforms will be thorough and sweeping. Final and decisive steps to crush the evil will be taken. Newton quotes 1, Samuel XXXVI, 9., "Let me smite him I pray thee with the spear even to the earth at once, and *I will not smite him the second time*." Mr. Verity's remarks (on ll. 113-131) that Milton condemns a certain section and not all the clergy is concluded with the enumeration of his charges. He condemns them because (1) they enter the church by unworthy means, for unworthy ends, to gain preferment, to enjoy well-being, it is no love of religion that brings them there, ll. 114-118. (2) They are ignorant, blind leaders of the blind, ll. 119-124. (3) They are indifferent about their duties, and incompetent to fulfil them, and leave the people without due teaching, ll. 122-125. (4) They allow false doctrines to spread, ll. 126-127. (5) They do not check perversions to the Roman Catholic Church, 128-129. In the last lines (130-131) Milton makes a prophecy that the day of retribution is near and that it would be sudden and decisive.

132-151. The poet invokes the pastoral muses once again after his digression, just as he invoked Arethuse after his first digression (line 85), now he invokes Alpheus her lover. "The stern invective which had scared away the Pastoral Muse, is now over, and Milton reverts lovingly and enthusiastically to a strain more congenial to his feelings." The poet says, "Return, Pastoral muse; the thunder is spent. Let the Sicilian vales send all their flowers to Lycid's hearse" (Elton).

132. Return—now that the digression is over the poet's anger has spent itself, the pastoral muse is invoked again. The ordinary pastoral style is resumed. Alpheus—the god of the river of that name in Arcadia, in Greece. The river flowed underground through the part of its course, and was believed by the ancients to pass under the sea and mingle its waters with those of the fountain of Arethusa, near Syracuse in Italy. Like Arethusa Alpheus symbolises pastoral verse. The dread voice is past—the thunder of St. Peter, who denounced the clergy is over. Jerram remarks: 'a passing recognition of the superior power of Christianity over Paganism.'

133. That shrink thy stream—stopped the flow of pastoral poetry. 'Shrunk' is used here transitively meaning 'caused to shrink'. Sicilian Muse—pastoral muse of Theocritus. He was the father of pastoral poetry.

134. Cast the vales... cast—let the valleys of Sicily send their flowers here. The poet imagines as if the body of King was before him.

135. Bells—bell-shaped flowers like the cow-slip.

136. The mild whispers use—where soft whispers

are accustomed to linger. **Use**—Haunt; are wont (to be;) frequent; dwell.

137. **Of shades**—the construction is—‘where the mild whispers of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks, use.’ **Wanton**—roving at will, unrestrained and, therefore, frolicsome and sportive.

138. **Whose**—refers to ‘vales’. **Fresh lap**—covered with green vegetation. **Swart star**—the Dog star, Sirius which rose at Athens about midsummer and was therefore supposed to cause hot weather and flowers towither. It is called ‘swart’ or blackening because it withers flowers and scorches vegetation. **Sparely**—seldom. **Looks**—casts its evil planetary influence. In those ever green valleys even in the hottest part of the year, when the ominous Dog star rises, the flowers and vegetation are not withered.

139. **Quaint enamell'd eyes**—brightly coloured flowers. **Quaint**—combines the ideas of ‘curious’ and ‘pretty’ (Flower). **Enamelled**—is used to express vivid and various colours, such as are found in enamel paintings. ‘Eyes’—the sweet flowers that look like eyes. The centre of a flower is also often called the *eye*.

140. **Suck the... showers**—feed on the sweet and refreshing rain. **Honied**—wholesome to the plants.

141. **Purple**—it is used here as a verb and the sense is ‘to make brilliant.’ The word does not suggest the particular colour, but any glowing colour from purple to scarlet. Latin *purpureus*—‘dazzling or rich of hue.’ **Vernal**—of spring time.

142. **Rathe**—early. It is an obsolete word and ‘rather’ is its comparative form. Tennyson revived

it—"the men of rath and riper years" (*In Memoriam*). Primrose—it is a yellow spring bloom. Forsaken dies—Milton first wrote 'unwedded' as it was suggested by Shakespeare in *Winter's Tale*—"Primroses that die unmarried ere they can behold Bright Phoebus in his strength". The flower is imagined to die heart-broken because forsaken by sunlight, while growing in a shady valley.

143. The tufted crow-toe—it is a common weed, the flower of which is supposed to bear a resemblance to a crow's foot. It is commonly called 'crow's foot' and grows singly and not in tufts. But as it divides into several parts the poet seems justified in using 'tufted'. Tufted—divided into several parts. Pale jessamine—white jessamine.

143. Pink—flower of any one of several plants of the genus *Dianthus*—carnation, etc. Pansy—it is a species of violet developed by cultivation into large blossoms of great variety of colour.

144. Freakt with jet—spotted with dark spots or streaks. Some varieties of pansy bear dark spots on the petals. 'Freckle' is the diminutive of 'fresh.'

146. Well attir'd woodbine—the honeysuckle with a beautiful foliage or blossoming richly. Wood bine or woodbind—is a climber and includes some kinds of ivy. It binds the trees hence the name. Well-attired—Hales gives two alternative interpretations—(1) well covered with leaves, (2) fair-flowered, well head-dressed. The head-dresses of Elizabethan ladies were called 'attiers'.

147. Cowslip—a beautiful and fragrant species of primrose, common in English pastures. Wan—pale. That hand....head—that hang their heads and seem pensive,' as if they were weighed down with grief. Pensive—sad.

148. That sad embroidery wears—all those flowers, suggestive of sorrow which wear faded colours or look pale. The colours of flowers may appear like mournful dresses. **Embroidery**—literally means ornamental needle work. Here the word suggests the variegated colours of flower-petals.

149. **Amaranthus**—the Greeks believed that the flower of this plant was everlasting and never faded. Gr. *Amarantos*—unfading. It is used for making funeral wreaths. **Bid Amaranthus shed**—Amaranthus should divest itself of all its beautiful flowers, because for the present occasion it must be like ‘every flower that sad embroidery wears.’ **Beauty**—lustre.

150. **Daffadillies**—daffodils or daffodowndilly. It is a yellow flower of the lily tribe—also called *King's spear*—the word is a corruption of ‘asphodel’. **Fill their cups with tears**—should be as if in mourning because required to form the funeral wreath.

151. **To strew the lies**—all these flowers were required to be scattered over the tomb of Lycidas **Laureate hearse**—the poet’s tomb. ‘Laureate’, crowned with laurels. Here the word has been variously explained—(1) “It may allude to ‘Lycidas’ being a poet or rather to his being lamented by poets” (*Hales*). (2) Decked with laurels (*Storr*). (3) The reference may be to the fact that King had obtained an academical degree. The first interpretation is certainly the best. **Hearse**—was used both for tomb and coffin. Here and originally it meant a triangular frame work of wood on which the coffin rested. Here it means ‘tomb.’ It was a favourite device of pastoral poets to enumerate a number of flowers and Milton has also followed the same practice. Many such passages are found and there is no need to suppose that Milton directly

imitated Spenser's. *Shepherd's Calendar, April*. In a well-known passage of *Modern Painters* Ruskin contrasts these lines of Milton with those in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (IV. 4. 118-127). Ruskin tries to show that Milton derived his knowledge of nature through the medium of books, whereas Shakespeare gives us the essential characteristic of each flower and his description is more imaginative. Modern critics have noticed that the country-bred Shakespeare was careful about the seasons of the flowers described; and Milton, like other pastoral poets, was not. The fact that nine out of eleven flowers mentioned by Milton would be over in the month of August when King died, does not at all detract from the beauty of the passage. What does it matter if some of these flowers belong to summer and some even to autumn. The most that can be said that his information was not derived directly from personal observation. It should be noticed, however that nearly all the flowers here mentioned are in some way connected with sorrow and mourning, and this may be the reason for bringing them all at once in his lines irrespective of their different blossoming seasons.

152-164. In order to gain a little temporary ease the poet imagines that Lycidas is in his tomb and that flowers are strewn on it. But immediately he realizes that his body has been carried away by wind and wave no one knows whither. 'But the hearse is empty, and his bones are hurled—where? To the Hebrides, or the mount where Michael gazes? Michael, restore him!' (Elton).

152. For so—by imaginining that the dead body of Lycidas is here and thus comfort ourselves with this fancy. To interpose a little ease—in order to gain a little temporary ease and soothe our grief.

153. Let our...surmise—let us indulge in the idle fancy and falsely suppose for our comfort that the dead body of Lycidas is lying before us. **Frail thoughts**—idle fancies. **Dally**—sport, play or trifle with. **False surmise**—vain supposition or make believe that the bones of Lycidas are in his hearse and not rolling in the deep. It may be noted that in 'let' the line is only one main verb and then follow a number of clauses, and at the end two imperatives are introduced by a kind of parenthesis.

154. Ay me!—'alas' The delusion under which the poet tried to find some relief has now vanished, and the cruel truth dawns upon his mind. **The shores...wash**—the meaning is 'the seas wash and shores mangle the corpse'.

155. Far away—the bones now cannot be found even near the place where the ship was wrecked, what to say of their being enclosed in a hearse.

156. Beyond....**Hebrides**—since King's body was never found, Milton surmises that it may have either been carried northwards to Hebrides, or (l.160) south towards Cornwall. **Hebrides**—Western Isles, a group of islands lying to the north of Scotland, and noted for the stormy seas around.

157. **Whelming**—overwhelming. Milton at first wrote 'humming' borrowed from Shakespeare—'humming water' (*Pericles* iii, i, 64),

158. **Monstrous world**—the bottom of the sea is a world full of monsters. Shakespeare has given a wonderful picture of 'the secrets of the deep' in Clarence's dream in *Richard III* (I, IV, 16-33).

159. **To our moist vows denied**—the body of Lycidas being denied to us or held back from our heartful prayers. **Moist vows**—according to Verity

are funeral rites performed with tearful eyes. The may refer to prayers accompanied with tears. 'I vows there may be an allusion to the usual promise of offerings made to Neptune that he might restore the dead body to the friends of the drowned.'

160. *Sleepst by the...old-lies dead* near Land's End in Cornwall. The fable of **Bellerus**—the fabled haunt of Bellerus; the region associated with the fable or his fable land. **Bellerus**—Bellerium was the name given by the Romans to Land's End, the extreme point of Cornwall. Milton has coined **Bellerus** as the name of an old giant of Cornwall, who may have given his name to the promontory. **Old**—a title of respect.

161-162. *Where the great...hold*—'whence the spirit of St. Michael looks out towards and sees Namancos and Bayona, in Spain.'

161. *The great vision*—the Archangel Michael himself is the vision. According to a tradition, the Archangel Michael appeared to some hermits on the small island or mount off the coast of Cornwall. The guarded mount—St. Michael's Mount where he appeared in a vision. The craggy seat is called after him 'St. Michael's Chair.' The rock stands opposite to Marazion and at one time there was a fort and a monastery and on the top of it is the so-called chair. **Guarded**—there are two meanings given to it—(1) a strong fortress regularly garrisoned; because there was an old Norman fortress, (2) guarded by the angel, Michael himself. The second meaning presumes that Michael did not only appear as a vision but permanently stays there.

162. *Looks toward*—it is a poetic idea of Milton's to imagine St. Michael still seated there, always looking towards Spain. It may be noted, as Warton

points out - "Camden tells us that Land's End is the only part of our island that looks directly towards Spain." Namancos .it is near Cape Finistere on the Spanish coast. Bayona's hold—the castle of Bayona. The site of these two places was discovered by the Miltonic editor Todd (1809), in an edition of *Mercurator's Atlas*—published in England in 1636, the year before Lycidas was written. Milton may well have used the atlas.

163-164. Milton has called up the vision of St. Michael and is so impressed by it that he, rather abruptly, turns from Lycidas and addresses the Angel. The editor Warton (1785) well explains, "look no longer seaward to Namancos and Bayonas hold... look homeward towards your own coast, and view with pity the corpse of the shipwrecked Lycidas floating hither." A critic remarks—"This passage is truly Miltonic in grandeur of conception." But Verity is of opinion that these two lines sound like an after thought.

163. Angel—it must be Michael who is bidden to turn from his gaze over seas and look with compassion upon mourners. Jerram thinks the Angel is Lycidas and Newton agrees thinking that the glorified spirit of Lycidas is addressed as an 'Angel' now. But the contrast between 'looks toward' and look homeward' makes it quite clear that Milton refers to Michael and not to Lycidas. Ruth—pity, an obsolete word. It survives in 'ruthless.'

164. Dolphius—an animal of the whale kind, about 8 or 10 feet long. It was a belief that it was a friendly fish to mankind and was much affected by music. Milton refers to a clasical legend. Arion, the famous musician who, when returning from Sicily to Corinth, with rich prizes, was threatened

with murder by sailors who wanted to rob him leapt into the sea, but a song-loving dolphin, charmed by his playing, carried him safely to land. Oz dolphin was said to have carried a boy daily across the bay of Puteoli, near Naples, and to have died of broken heart after the boy's death. Milton bids dolphins to 'waft the hapless youth' and do a friendly deed, for was not Lycidas a singer as Arion was? **Waft**—carry. It is used especially of carrying across, or traversing, the surface of the sea. **Waftage**—passage by water. **Hapless**—Unlucky; unhappy.

165-185. The poet changes the gloomy and mournful strain into that of hope and tries to comfort himself and other mourners. The despondent mood of the last lines suddenly changes into that of joyous assurance that Lycidas is not dead, but now pursues his art in the kingdom of the Blest. There all saints entertain him and he has now become the guardian of all who sail by the fatal coast. "Weep no more. Like the sun, Lycid will rise again, by the might of his Saviour, and sing among the angels and be patron saint of the sea-tossed (*Elton*). The mourning shepherds are now called upon to rejoice, because Lycidas has attained immortality. This is the concluding passage of the monody, the last eight lines being the epilogue.

166. **Your sorrow**—the object of your sorrow, whom you mourn. A Latinism 'he whom you sorrow for.' **Is not dead**—has attained immortality and now he lives in heaven. Cf.—"Our love, our hope, our sorrows, is not dead." (Shelley: *Adonais*). In many famous elegies sorrow dies away and gives place to consolation at the end. Mourners are comforted with the idea that through death the lost person has found life.

167. **Wat'ry floor**—the surface of the sea. Shakespeare has “the floor of heaven” (*Merchant of Venice* v, i, 58). Compare ‘level’ in l. 98.

168. **The day-star**—the sun. More commonly the title was applied to the morning star, Lucifer. Perram says: “The day star may possibly as Newton thinks, be the sun, which is called the ‘urnal star’ in *Paradise Lost*. x. 1069.” Compare—“while the bright day-star rides his glorious round” Sylvester’s *Dubartas*. **In the ocean bed**—in the Western ocean. Reference is probably to the old belief that the sun sank into the “steep Atlantic stream.”

169. **Anon repairs.....head**—immediately he sees again and renews his brightness. **Repairs**—makes fresh again—a Latinism. Compare—“Tomorrow he repairs his golden flood”

Gray : *The Bard*.

170. **Tricks his beams**—‘flashes with renewed brilliancy because washed in the ocean.’ **Tricks**—gives out; adorns or sets off to the best advantage. **With new spangled ore**—with bright golden rays. **pangle**—a small thin plate or boss of shining metal, and so *spangled* is something adorned and made sparkling and brilliant. By **ore** Milton probably meant ‘gold’, though properly it is a ‘vein’ of any kind of metal. The word **ore**—always has the sense of gold in Shakespeare. Probably it was due to the confusion between ‘ore’ and *aurum*—(gold). Compare

“And spangled heavens in golden robes invests.”

Fletcher : *Purple Island*. VII, I.

171. **Flames**—shines brightly. **The forehead**...  
**sky**—the eastern horizon is beautifully called the ‘forehead of the sky.’

172. So Lycidas . . . high—just as the sun sets in the west to rise again in full glory next morning in the east, so Lycidas sank low only to go to heaven. Sunk—sank. Mounted high—has been raised to heaven. Compare—

"That he mount to heav'n, He sunk to Hell  
That he might live. He di'd; that he might rise,  
He fell".

Fletcher : *Purple Island* vii, 1

173. Through the dear might—the saving or redeeming power; through the mercy of Jesus That walked the waves—who had power over the sea. The allusion is to the miracle performed by christ and described in *Matthew*—XIV. 22. The appropriateness of the allusion is obvious. Walked—is used here transitively. Dear—is a transferred epithet: 'the might of that dear saviour'.

174. Where other groves . . . streams—different from the earthly groves and streams. The pastoral life, the poet fancies, continues in heaven also. Milton does not praise heaven directly; he simply suggests that things there are different from what we have in this world. This is more effective. Other implies 'better'. Where—to that place where. The construction is 'mounted high to that place where etc. along—in the midst of.'

175. Nectar pure—nectar is the drink of gods as ambrosia is their food in heaven. But in Milton it appears to mean any fragrant liquid, and here the poet possibly refers to the liquid of the streams mentioned in the previous line. His oozey locks . . . laves—he washes his muddy locks. Oozy—clammy with brine. Laves—washes. Milton conveys Lycidas transferred bodily to heaven.

176. Unexpressive....song inexpressible marriage song. The allusion is to *Rerelation* xix 6, 7, and XXII, 7.

Where all true believers are spoken of as "bidden to the marriage feast of the lamb of God". The whole ceremony is symbolical.

177. In the love—in the blessed kingdoms of joy and love where dwell the Meek. The construction of the line is to be noted.

178. Their entertain .. above—he is welcomed in heaven by all the saints. Entertain—welcome. Saints—the blessed ones.

179. Solemn troops—dignified groups. Sweet societies—of angels. The reference is to that elaborate hierarchy of angels which Milton described in *Paradise Lost*—"The sons of Light" sitting "in fellowships of joy" (XI, 80) Societies—because there are so many orders of the angels in heaven.

180. Move—dance. The line reminds one of Shelley's *Skylark*—"and singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest". In *Paradise Lost* also Milton has a similar idea. "That move in mystic dance not without song." (V. 177).

181. And wipe eyes—it is a Biblical phrase. Compare *Isaiah* XXV, 8; *Revelation* VII, 17. Where we find, "and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces" and, "and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" Milton transfers the act of saints. The tears in the eyes of Lycidas indicate his sorrow of his untimely death and the wasted promises of youth.

183 Hence forth.....shore—guardian angel of the sea coast near which he was drowned. It is a distinctly pagan idea. Milton shows himself an incorrigible son of the Renaissance by introducing

a pagan belief, following so close upon the scriptural sentiment and language. Jerram remarks, "Many will agree with Todd in wishing that after the sublime intimation of angels wiping the tears from the eyes of Lycidas he had not been converted into the classical (*Pagan*) genius of the shore .. the mention of him here serves, somewhat inartistically, to mark a return to the pastoral form in which the poem is chiefly set". Verity also considers it one more example of confusion of effect. Genius—the protecting spirit..

184. In thy large recompense—'as bounteous requital to thee for thy drowning'. Thy—made to thee. Probably Milton is referring to the belief often mentioned in Latin poetry, that the spirit of the drowned man remains as the guardian angel of the locality where he met his fate to prevent future voyagers from a like disaster. Shall be good—shall protect and save from disaster.

185. Perilous flood—stormy sea. 'To all that sail over that dangerous sea'. Instead of 'in' we now say 'over' or 'on' (Hales).

186-193. "Here", says Professor Masson, "the Monody or Pastoral ends. The last eight lines of the poem do not belong to the Monody. They are not part of a song sung by Milton in his imaginary character as the shepherd who is bewailing Lycidas, but are distinctly a stanza of Epilogue, in which Milton speaks directly, criticises what he has first written in his imaginary character, and is about to turn to other occupations". "The minstrel ceases singing as the day goes down. The dirge is done: but the morrow brings new labour and shepherding" (Elton).

186. The uncouth swain—the unskilled poet. Uncouth—seems to signify not only 'unknowing'

and 'unskilled' but also, according to its original meaning, 'unknown, strange, unfamiliar'. Milton may be referring to himself as 'an unknown poet' though conscious of his future greatness.

187. While the.....gray—'morning' is here compared to a pilgrim as in *Paradise Regained* (IV, 426)—"Till Morning fair came forth with pilgrim steps in amice gray". Still—silent. With sandals gray—at gray dawn. The shepherd had begun to sing at day-break but in his eagerness he had continued till evening" (Bell). In praise of this line Fowler says, "The line is exquisite as music and equally lovely as a picture".

188. He—'the uncouth swain' or Milton himself. Touched the stops... quills—played upon various reeds and produced a variety of notes. The reference is to the varying note of the poem—now tender, now indignant, and now pathetic. "There had been changes of mood, and minute changes of metre in the lay (Masson). Tender stops—the holes in shepherd's reed pipe to regulate the sound. They are tender because affected by the delicate touch of the fingers. Various quills—the reeds of which the pipes are made, and which represent the different moods of the poem.

189. With eager thought—with anxious care Thought—care. Warbling—singing. Doric lay—a typical name for a pastoral poem, since Theocritus, Bion, Moscus and other Greek pastoral poets wrote in the dialect which was a Doric variety of the Greek. It was a new and softened dialect. Lay—song.

190. And now.....hills—Lengthened the shadows of hills since evening was approaching. Hills—shadows of hills.

191. And now . . bay—and now the sun had set and gone down the Atlantic ocean. Was—had.

192. He—the shepherd. Twitted—wrapped quickly and closely round, on account of the chilliness of the evening. His mantle blue—blue was the usual colour of the dress of shepherds.

193. Tomorrow to fresh new—This is a line very often quoted. Milton says that having finished this elegy he is about to turn to other occupations. Various meanings have been given to this line:

(1) The line refers to his projected Italian tour. Jerram observes, "It is better to refer these words to the projected Italian tour with which his mind must now have been occupied, than to any poetical intention at this time".

(2) *Lycidas* (1637)—marks the end of the first period in Milton's life and he produced scarcely any poetry for nearly thirty years. The spirit of the Houston period is absent from his later works. It may refer to his intention of taking part in the political strife and controversies of the times.

(3) Pattison reads an unfulfilled promise in these words that Milton would soon return to pastoral poetry. He observes, "He never fulfilled the promise with which *Lycidas* concludes, "Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new".

(4) The words may have reference to his final decision in separating himself from the Anglican and court party to identify himself with the Puritan party.

(5) Verity favours the idea of a scholar who wrote to him: 'The reason for the shepherd's going to new haunts is that the old ones are associated

with Lycidas, and so he cannot hear to feed his sheep there alone—a very just idea—and an admirable exit".

(6) Professor Masson thinks that the poem is "a tribute to Milton's friend rendered passingly in the midst of other occupations". Which interpretation is correct?—is a question not easy to answer, and perhaps not of great importance. We prefer Verity's with a passing reference to the Italian Tour.

It may be noted that these eight lines are in regular *ottava rima* ordered measure after the irregular rhymes and single lines of the poem. "There can be few more musical lines in English" (Elton). Compare—

Home then, my Lambs; the falling drops eschew;  
Tomorrow shall ye feast in pastures new;  
Fletcher: *Purple Island*.

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# WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

(1770-1850)

## HIS LIFE.

### Early life—

William Wordsworth, the second child of John Wordsworth, an attorney, was born at Cockermouth in Cumberland, on April 7, 1770. On his father's and mother's side he came of an old north-country stock of good social standing. But if we are to trace an inheritance of genius, it must rather be sought in the poet's maternal ancestry. His mother, whose maiden name was Anne Cookson, died when he was only eight years old. She was anxious about the future of this child out of her five, and she once remarked, "he would be remarkable, either for good or evil."

As a child Wordsworth was stubborn, moody, and of a violent temper. Punishments made him obstinate and defiant, and on one occasion his violent temper drove him to the verge of committing suicide. In his childhood his constant playmate was Dorothy, the younger sister, who was destined to exercise a profound influence upon Wordsworth's career as a poet. When the mother died in 1778 boys were sent to school at Hawkshead and Dorothy went to live at Penrith with her mother's relations.

### At Hawkshead—

At eight years old he was sent to school at Hawkshead, close to Esthwaite Lake, a few miles from Windermere, where he remained, boarding in the cottage of a village dame, for about six years. While at this grammar school he was allowed to read whatever books he liked. Fielding's novels, *Don Quixote*, *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Tale of a*

even, like Coleridge, Southey and Shelley, an intellectual rebel. If he was not tempted by "college studies and their set rewards" it would be a mistake to suppose that life at the University did not contribute to the making of the poet that he was to be. Even in these years he was meditative and susceptible to scenic beauties, and he showed unmistakable signs of his deepest things being with the simple life of the country.

### *His tours and return to London—*

The periods most stimulating to his mind, however, were the long vacations. He spent the summer of 1788 among the English lakes, and next year, in company with his dear sister Dorothy, and Mary Hutchinson, his future wife he wandered amid the beautiful scenery of Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Dorothy was to be his life-long guide and companion. She preserved the poet in him and transformed mere observations into imaginative visions. His sense of gratefulness is expressed by the poet in beautiful words:—

"She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;  
And humble cares, and delicate fears;  
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,  
And love, and thought, and joy."

He had not been long at Cambridge, when one morning returning from a scene of rustic gaiety the idea suddenly flashed upon his mind that his life's mission was poetry. He records his feelings of that moment in these words:—

"I made no vows, but vows  
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me  
Was given, that I should be, else sinning  
greatly,

A dedicated spirit."

In the following year—during the early days of the French Revolutionary movement—he accomplished, with a college friend, a pedestrian tour through France, Switzerland, and Italian lake country, and incorporated his experiences in a poem entitled *Descriptive Sketches*, just as the English tour was embodied in the *Evening Walk*.

Wordsworth took the B. A. degree at Cambridge in 1791, and then settled in London, entering with much imaginative interest into the life of the great city, but without any definite plans for his future career. Desiring to acquire the French language, more thoroughly and influenced by the new hopes and aspirations of France, he left London in November 1791 and went to Orleans. He was filled with republican enthusiasm. To him, with his ideal fervour for the dignity of man, the French Revolution seemed a matter of course:—

"Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,  
France standing on the top of golden hours,  
And human nature seeming born again"

He decided to become a leader of the Girondist party and this would have certainly led to his execution. But his friends, rescued him from such a position. His money allowance was stopped and he was forced to return before he could take the decided and fatal step.

When Louis XVI was executed his hopes of a new-born liberty and progress were rudely shattered. He almost lost his faith in man and God, as well as in his own mission in life, when France declared war against England in 1793. They were very gloomy days that he spent in London, his aims shattered and no prospects of settled life in future for him. One

thing was however, certain that poetry would be his vocation. His life in London was not quite unproductive as two or three noble sonnets and *The Reverie of Poor Susan* testify.

### Settles at Alfoxden; meeting with Coleridge—

Though his belief in revolutionary theories was gone yet he gained a deeper sense of the dignity of man. His sister's womanly sympathy and love helped to dispel the dark clouds of despair and disbelief in human progress. About this time Wordsworth found himself in possession of a legacy of £900 left by an admiring friend Raisley Calvert. The problem of a living was easily solved and Wordsworth was now free to devote himself to poetry. He settled with his sister at Ræddown, but in 1797 they removed to Alfoxden in Somersetshire, near the Quantock Hills, and thus became neighbours of Coleridge, who afterwards became their life long friend.

### Lyrical Ballads—

We know that Wordsworth had started writing poetry since the age of fourteen and that his sensibility to Nature and interest in man were daily being intensified. His attitude towards Nature was expressed by him in clear words when he wrote as a boy: "I date from it my consciousness of infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age so far as I was acquainted with them, and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency."

He realised that not only he was a dedicated spirit, but had to contribute something new to English poetry which no other poet had done before. His close association with Coleridge bore fruit after

two years' stay in his neighbourhood. In 1798 in conjunction with Coleridge, he published *Lyrical Ballads*, an epoch-making volume of verses. In 1800 the poet added a preface which formally defended the theory of poetic art in accordance with which the poems had been written. The critics were infuriated as they regarded Wordsworth's theory of diction as revolutionary and decidedly against the prevailing tastes and practice of the 18th century. The contribution of Coleridge included *The Ancient Mariner*. His purpose was to write on supernatural objects, taken from common life, but looked at, as much as might be, through an imaginative medium; whereas Wordsworth chose common incidents of common life heightened with poetic imagination. Coleridge's contributions were meant to ennoble romance by allaying it to truth of human feeling; Wordsworth's to shed an ideal light over reality. Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* strikes the characteristic note of his genius, as he hears in Nature "The still sad music of humanity" and feels its power "to chasten and subdue;" and clearly realizes, "a motion and a spirit, that impels all thinking things." The *Lyrical Ballads*, the joint production of two great poet-friends marks the beginning of a new era in English poetry.

### In Germany—

(Immediately after the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth and Dorothy went to Germany to learn German and spend winter at Goslar. Here he composed some of his best pieces, *Lucy Gray*, *Ruth*, *The Poet's Epitaph*, *Nutting*, and the beautiful love poems, on "Lucy." "In none of his poetry have the tender grace of English scenery and English girlhood been painted more delicately than in the lines which came to him as he paced the

frozen gardens of that winter city." It was here that he planned the autobiographical poem *Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, which was dedicated to Coleridge.

### Settles at Grasmere

In 1799 Wordsworth settled at Grasmere in the Lake District removing in 1813 to Rydal Mount of immortal memory. On the 4th of October, 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson of Penrith whose friendship he had formed during his College days. The marriage proved quite happy though it was not an important event in his imaginative life. She made a good wife and an interesting companion, but as an influence she cannot rank with Dorothy. His deep and unwavering love for his wife finds utterance in three or four poems, the best of which is the little gem "She was a Phantom of Delight." Wordsworth now lived an ideal, happy life of a poet round Grasmere and Rydal. He now finally settled amid the most charming natural scenery, surrounded by congenial friends, and in the company of a devoted sister and his loving wife. It was in such surroundings and happy company that Wordsworth pursued his scheme of life and gave to the world poems which not only embody his philosophy but form the most important contribution to English poetry. It may be mentioned that through Lord Lonsdale's interest he was appointed to the distributorship of stamps for the counties of Westmoreland and Cumberland and he held the post till 1842. For fifty years Wordsworth lived at Grasmere and Rydal Mount, and it was there that the famous poems like the sonnets on Milton and Westminster Bridge and *Ode to Duty*, as well as the longer poems were written. The *Ode on Immortality* was written in 1807. It is characteristic of Wordsworth that

his poems were written under the excitement of some break in the monotony of his quiet life. The more important of his poems are almost invariably so dated. It is said that after 1807 there is a certain falling off in the quality of his poetry. The poetic vigour is gradually vanishing and the critics rightly complain that after *Laodamia* and his sonnet in reply to critics, *High is our calling Friend* there is a distinct decline in his power.

### The Prelude and the Excursion—

There are two longer poems, however, which require mention. When Wordsworth was in Germany he resolved to write a long poem *The Prelude* forming its introduction. *The Prelude* was finished in 1805, and on the whole this is his most interesting and characteristic work. It was written at long intervals and it contains a history of his own mind and its gradual growth till he came to recognize the great mission of his life. But the longer poem of which the *Prelude* was an introduction could never be finished. Wordsworth wanted to call it *The Recluse*. Out of the three parts only the second could be written and so he called it *The Excursion* and published it in 1814. It was designed as a great philosophical poem on man, Nature, and society. The poet's hope was that when completed it would be "the first and the only true philosophical poem in existence". But that was not to be and only a fragment has been given to the world. The poem was assailed by the critics and there is no doubt that it provides a rather dull reading. There are, no doubt, some fine passages, but on the whole it is prolix, devoid of life and probability, and we are not surprised at the thundering denunciation of Jeffrey's, 'this will never do.' Adverse criticism had a depressing effect on 'Wordsworth's poetic powers

and for some-time he produced no poetry. In 1815 he published the *White Doe* and four years later brought out *Peter Bell*.

His *Evening Ode* published a year earlier gave full evidence of his characteristic power and alluded to the fading away of the visionary splendours of earlier years. He made several tours in the country and on the Continent and continued to write though not without signs of failing powers. In 1842 he brought forth a complete collection of his poems.

#### *His popularity—*

Though often bitterly criticised Wordsworth at length attained honour and wide-spread influence. After many years of neglect he was at last regarded by many with respect: with respect and affection by a few, but concerning his, poetic genius there was no cavilling. His fame was now firmly established, and his title to greatness as a poet was widely recognized—if not so universally, as it has been recognized in our own days. The intelligent criticism of Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*, and the ardent championship of Wilson in Blackwood's Magazine helped the general reader to appreciate and to take a proper view of the poet's art. In 1839 the University of Oxford conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law and it was with an unprecedented enthusiasm that the poet was welcomed at the function. In October 1842 Sir Robert Peel conferred upon him an annuity of £ 300 from the Civil List in recognition of his distinguished literary merit. A year later, when Southey died, Wordsworth was persuaded to accept the office of Poet Laureate.

#### *Family and Friends—*

Wordsworth was a model husband and a most

affectionate father. Of his five children two died in his life time and he felt their loss profoundly. Dorothy was his friend philosopher and guide; the attachment between the brother and the sister and their intellectual companionship remind us of Charles and Mary Lamb. Wordsworth was fortunate in his friends. Almost all the great literary men among his contemporaries were his personal friends and there are fine reminiscences of their association with Wordsworth and the members of his family. De Quincey's description of the poet's household is a charming tribute. Coleridge was more like a member of the family rather than a mere collaborator or admirer. Southey, Dr. Arnold of Rugby were others who formed a small circle of distinguished friends. To Sir Walter Scott Wordsworth paid a visit in one of his tours in Scotland. Sir George Howland Beaumont, Lamb, Hogg, Crabbe and Felicia Hemans were other great admirers of Wordsworth's genins and were happy to be counted among his friends.

### Wordsworth as a Man

There was an impression that Wordsworth was a cold taciturn man. He was, as a matter of fact, a man of passionate nature who had subjected his nature to rigorous self-control. Behind his natural reserve glowed a strong deep, ever violent feeling. In social converse he was grave, but animated, ready to receive and ready to communicate. But he was deficient in those touches of light and shade, those little graces of disposition, that endear a man to his friends. He took a deep and kindly interest in the concerns of his humbler neighbours. His habitual consecration of all the energies to the highest moral and spiritual aims reminds us of Milton's resolve to dedicate the best in him for the

service of humanity. His habits were simple, ever austere and his life through youth and manhood was a life of flawless purity. He could be genial in the company of younger men, even when their opinions differed widely from his own. Remarkable was his sympathy for womanhood and childhood. His affection for his brothers, sister and daughters bears witness to his warm loving nature.

In his early youth he did manifest a revolutionary tendency but experience taught him and so did Nature, the love of order, custom and law. His political opinions were inclined towards conservatism, though he was not opposed to ordered progress. Wordsworth has described himself in stanzas written in his pocket-copy of Thomson's *Castle Indolence*. The picture is wonderfully characteristic. Carlyle, who liked the man better than the poet, has given a fine pen picture which closes thus:—"The eyes were not very brilliant but they had a quiet clearness; there was enough of brow and well-shaped; rather too much of cheek; face of squarish shape and decidedly boyish: large-boned, lean, and still firm knit, tall and strong looking when he stood, a right good old steel-grey figure, with a fine rustic simplicity and dignity about him, and a voracious strength looking through him."

Wordsworth bore with dignified fortitude and deepening religious resignation the sorrows caused by the death of dear friends and relations, and closed his long and, on the whole, a happy life at Rydal Mount on 23rd. April, 1850. He was buried in Gasmere church-yard.

#### The Romantic Revival—

English poetry in the eighteenth century laboured heavily under convention and artificiality. The

classical writers, like Pope, slavishly adhered to the ancient models, and consequently their poetry lacked spontaneity and fervour. The poetic diction was full of pompous words and grandiloquent expressions, and too much emphasis was laid on correctness. The poets drew their inspiration not directly from Nature and their personal observation of life, but from the writings of classical masters. Their range was limited and narrow, and poetry in their hands lost much of its emotional quality and became conventional and mechanical. Order, clarity and tranquility are qualities generally associated with classical literature, but these qualities when over emphasised impeded freedom, necessary for the growth and approximation to life of literature. Order degenerated into routine, clarity into commonplace, and tranquillity, when formally imposed, abhorred sentiment. Poetry became soulless.

In the middle of the century signs of revolt against the rigid rules of classicism became visible, and this revolution, when completed, vitalized literature by introducing variety, contrast, liberty and imagination. The spirit of revolt had a far-reaching and profound effect upon art, politics and literature. In the domain of literature it is called the Romantic Revival. As Wordsworth took very important part in bringing about and firmly establishing this great change in poetic methods and ideals, because his own artistic purpose and achievement embody the new spirit, it becomes necessary to understand its true significance.

Pater defines the romantic character in art as consisting in "the addition of strangeness to beauty". "The desire for beauty", says he "being a fixed element in every artistic organization, it is the addition of curiosity to this desire of beauty that

(1) Attitude towards Nature—For the Romantics Nature was not dead, inert matter, serving only as a background for the human drama. For them it was pervaded by spirit or soul and was a living and speaking presence, capable of holding communion with, and responding to the emotions of man. They perceived a deep-seated spiritual significance underlying external phenomena. They had a feeling of tenderness and reverence for nature and they glorified even the common objects and sang of the lurking beauty in them. They felt that the beneficial influence of nature upon our morals had not been properly appreciated by the classists. Their cry was 'Back to nature' as they believed, that many evils in society were due to our ignorance of her promptings or violation of her laws. They observed

natural phenomena most minutely and their descriptions are vivid and realistic.

(2) **Attitude towards man**—Man as man acquired a dignity which had not been allowed to him before. Simply joys and sorrows of common people rapturously dealt with by poets were as good subjects for poetry as men in high life. The classicists confined their attention only to the high life and excluded common people, as dull and uninteresting, from their works. Child-life and animal-life are also treated with enthusiasm and poetic imagination. Greater sympathy and understanding for the suffering humanity are evidenced by the writings of the romantics.

### **(3) Glorification of the natural impulses—**

Natural impulse was not to be distrusted or looked upon with suspicion. It is a sign of healthy mentality to allow impulses to assert themselves and find suitable expression. In the preceding age they were denounced and curbed and literature did not reflect the true spirit of the individual. Now their suppression was believed to be injurious to art and harmful to the poet himself.

### **(4) Revived interest in the past—**

Against the immediate past the romantics rebelled but they found an antiquarian interest in the remote past, especially the middle ages. That period proved fruitful in suggesting themes and satisfied the craving for the mysterious, as well as for the picturesque. It fascinated imagination by its romantic stories.

### **(5) Subjectivity—**

The poet does not lose his personality in conventional modes of expression. His imagination is

allowed full play and his individuality gives a tone and colour to his work. The personal attitude towards life finds free expression. The poet feels justified in giving his own criticism of life and paint things as they strike his imagination. His own outlook on nature and man has to be found in his works.

### (6) Style—

Simplicity of style got rid of the vice of an artificial and unreal manner of writing. The appeal is more to emotion than to intellect or reason. Many experiments are made and new themes and metres are introduced.

All these features distinguished the works of the Romantics and we find in them 'a subtle sense of mystery, an exuberant intellectual curiosity, and an instinct for the elemental simplicities of life.'

### Characteristics as a poet—

Like Milton, Wordsworth realized early that he was to live a dedicated life and that his mission was poetry. For him poetry was not a mere amusement for idle hours. It was a high calling. Wordsworth knew that he would have to oppose the conventional poetic diction, and the true aim and worth of his work were not likely to find ready acceptance. It was not possible for Wordsworth to shake off immediately the influence of the so-called Classical School of the eighteenth century, but he had to carry on a crusade against it almost all his life. He deliberately attained simplicity and purity of style which had not been considered essential qualities of poetry by those who favoured stilted phrases and conventional language.

Wordsworth's successful attempt at purity and simplicity necessarily led him to adhere strictly to truth and vivid natural descriptions. His observation of natural phenomena in their varying aspects is accurate, and his descriptions have a freshness of out-of-door study. He does not observe nature, as seen by Lady of Shalott reflected through a mirror, but minutely watches even its passing changes and varying moods. In the minuteness of his observation Wordsworth compares with Tennyson. Their descriptions are equally vivid and realistic, but the former is simpler in expression.

Wordsworth believed in the principle of plain living and high thinking. As we know his life was a little austere. Soberity, sanity and seriousness were his guiding principles. These qualities uniformly characterize his work and stamp it with his individuality. He entertained a high notion of his calling as a poet and, therefore, it is natural to find a complete absence of flippancy and morbid sentimentality in his poetry. There is absolutely nothing which may even remotely appeal to the lower passions in man. His is "a stately speech" though it may not be so dignified as that of Milton, the organ voice of England. His sense of morality is so lofty that not a word escapes from his pen suggesting any compromise in this respect. High seriousness informs his poetic purpose and he uniformly maintains a proper sense of values in life.

Another remarkable feature of Wordsworth's poetry is its broad and deep sympathy for man as man and for dumb animals. It extends even to vegetable life. For him nature was a living presence, a friend and guide, and so cruelty in any form was abhorrent to his nature. His enthusiasm

for humanity would have landed him into difficulty if he had been allowed to take an active part in the politics of France. Though his political views gradually changed, republican sympathies were gone and he drifted into conservatism, yet he always advocated human freedom and opposed social tyranny. He upheld the moral dignity of man and his sympathy for poor village folk was unbounded. He may not have sung praises of democratic ideals but, as Stopford Brooke says, "He is the foremost singer of those who threw around the lives of homely men and women the glory and sweetness of song." Unspoilt by social conventions of an artificial society the poor people were nearer to nature and Wordsworth, therefore, not only championed but loved them. As Keble said, "he has shed a celestial light upon the affections, the occupations, the piety of the poor." The classical writers simply ignored them as subjects unfit for poetry : whereas Wordsworth glorified them and confessed to an unconscious love and reverence of human nature. Illustrations of his pity for animals and feeling of tenderness for everything that lives abound in his shorter poems. For Wordsworth believed that "every flower enjoys the air it breathes," and that "there is a spirit in the woods."

One more important characteristic of Wordsworth is the synthesis between external things and his own mind and his own mood. What he writes is never purely objective. And hence to enter into his work we must have some affinity with his mind and must be able to share his mood and temper. Without such a sympathetic understanding on the part of the reader Wordsworth is likely to appear an egotist without any appreciable power to charm or elevate. Those who learn to love him acquire a settled passion for his works.

Wordsworth is the rarest thing among poets, a complete innovator. He looked at things in a new way—in his own way. He found his subjects in new and unexpected places; and he put them into a new poetic form. At the turning point of his life, in his early manhood, he made one great discovery, had one great vision which he made his lifelong mission to reveal to others. He had found nature and in nature an indwelling spirit and peace.

### **His excellences—**

Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* has with his critical insight enumerated the merits and demerits of Wordsworth's poetry. They may profitably be mentioned here:—

(1) An austere purity of language—in short, a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning.

(2) A correspondent weight and sanity of the thoughts and sentiments, won not from books, but from the poet's own meditative observation. They are fresh and have the dew upon them.

(3) The sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs: the frequent *curias felicitas* of his diction.

(4) The perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions as taken immediately from nature, and proving a long and genial intimacy with the very spirit which gives the physiognomic expression to all the works of nature.

(5) A meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility: a sympathy with man as man, the sympathy, indeed of a contemplator rather than a fellow-sufferer or co-mate.

(6) The challenge for this poet—the gift of imagination, in the highest and strictest sense of the word.

In mild and philosophic pathos, Wordsworth appears to me without a compeer ... But in imaginative power, he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own.

### His defects—

(1) The inconsistency of the style, *i. e.*, the sudden and unprepared transitions from lines or sentences of peculiar felicity to a style not only unimpassioned but undistinguished.

(2) A certain matter-of-factness appearing either as a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of subjects, and their positions, as they appeared to the poet himself, or the insertion of characters, their dispositions, and actions.

(3) An undue predilection for the dramatic form.

(4) Occasional prolixity, repetition, and an eddying instead of progressing of thought.

(5) Thoughts and images too great for the subject—"a sort of mental bombast"—"the awkwardness and strength of Hercules with the distaff off Omphale."

Wordsworth's work shows amazing inequality. There are sublime poems and at the same time we find dull prosaic verses. Greater part of the work cannot sustain his reputation. Wordsworth gains in reputation, as Mathew Arnold said, when read in selections. He was not sufficiently self-critical in judging his own work. If he had been so, posterity might have been spared so voluminous a body of indifferent verse.

He was constantly obsessed with the idea of his being a teacher. With the result that he often

repeats his ideas, forgets the main function of a poet to afford imaginative pleasure to the reader. His poetic energy languishes when he gives long expositions of abstruse ideas. He is lacking in the sense of proportion and makes no conscious effort to attain artistic perfection. When even trite ideas are expressed in verse, poetry is bound to degenerate and become lifeless and prosaic.

A greater part of his life time he spent far away from society and the normal activities of common people. The result was that he became self-centred and meditative. He kept himself practically cut off from the main currents of life and thought. That was one of the more important reasons for the narrowness of his range and limited interests.

There are a few more defects which an admirer of Wordsworth will readily admit. There is an entire lack of humour in his writings. Then there is an absence of passionate love, though his one poem, *She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways* is the best of its kind. Wordsworth induces a feeling of peacefulness and tranquillity and so violent moods and passions of man and nature are not described by him.

In spite of all that may be said against him his poetry has an enduring value and some critics place only Shakespeare and Milton above him among English poets.

 **His attitude towards Nature.** No estimate of Wordsworth's poetry would be complete without understanding his attitude towards Nature, because in this he is superbly original and stands almost alone among the poets of Nature. He has not created for us new worlds and peopled our memory

with forms of unearthly grandeur and supernal loveliness, but he has, as it were, recreated for us this world that lies around us; he has shed over it

|| The light that never was on sea or land,  
|| The consecration, and the poet's dream.

(To Pope and other poets of his school Nature was a convenient store-house of conventional images.) It must be embellished for poetical purpose. They did not paint it but tried to decorate it with tricks of phrase and metaphors. Nature as it is did not inspire them. Shakespeare also looked upon Nature as a mere sympathetic background for human emotion and human thought. Tennyson also had a similar attitude. We have heard a great deal of Nature 'red in tooth and claw', of its furious, storms and savagery, of anything but its love. The view which science takes of Nature has a great deal of truth in it. But it deals with what is apparent and that which informs our intellect or senses. There can be another point of view also but it was generally ignored or did not strike scientists or poets of nature. Behind the mighty wasting, terrors and savagery of Nature's forces, we may discover quiet of ordered law, the calm of the unity of idea, and may conceive of a central peace at the heart of things.

In order to analyse the meaning of the vague term 'Nature' it is necessary to have a conception of the stages through which Wordsworth himself passed in his thoughts about it. At first, like other Nature poets, he was delighted by its sensuous manifestations. Fishing, skating, bathing in pools, the hunting for birds' eggs, and similar other 'coarser pleasures' afforded him opportunities for 'glad animal movements' in his boyhood. But

gradually he began to feel dimly conscious of something which demanded his attention. And one day his heart was suddenly filled with gratitude for the sweetness of the scene before him and he at once felt that he was to be a dedicated spirit. This feeling changed his attitude towards Nature and it became something much more than a mere pageant of colour or means of mere sensuous enjoyment. Up to this stage Nature, delightful and beautiful indeed, had not entered his soul but now he seemed to be possessed by it and it was now all in all for him. The beauties of natural phenomena, their sounds, colours and forms haunted him even when they were not actually present before him. The visible beauties of Nature, as he says, 'were then to me an appetite'. But this love of Nature could not completely satisfy his soul for a long time. The dizzy, raptures were disturbed by obstinate questionings, blank misgivings and the still sad 'music of humanity'. Man cannot escape suffering by trying to live in an ideal world of beauty. Wordsworth began to see the world as veil concealing something invisible behind it. The enjoyment of the visible world could not satisfy that enquiring spirit searching after the mystical in Nature.

In passing from this stage to the final Wordsworth was influenced by two forces, *viz.* the French Revolution which tried to readjust the framework of society and regulate man's relation to man on a more equitable basis. Apart from its influence upon Wordsworth's political views it changed his attitude towards man and his poetic treatment of him. He generally chose humble and rustic life for his subjects, because in that condition the essential conditions of the heart find a better soil and elementry feelings co-exist in a state of greater

simplicity. The German philosophers suggested to Wordsworth the idea that there was intelligence in things and that Nature was sentient. With the outward show of things, with Nature's bewildering profusion, her teeming concrete life, her riddles, her magical appeal to the eye and the sense of touch, he was little concerned. Now he discovered that there was a mystic relation between the mind of man and outward things. There is an indwelling spirit linking Man and Nature and this mystic relation between them he propounded in his poetry, and it is in this that his great distinction lies. Nature becomes a living Presence and man's mind can commune with it. He says:—

'And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts.'

Now the primrose and the daffodils become the symbols of Nature's message to man. Nature can teach him more than books, and, he believes, "That we can feed this mind of ours in wise passiveness". Contemplation reveals the truth of things and leads to mystical experience. 'That blessed mood' can be induced in which the burthen of the mystery is lightened and we see into the life of things. For Wordsworth Nature is both law and impulse, inducing joyous and peaceful attitude of the mind. He is the Poet Priest of Nature and his tender devotion is rewarded with joy, quietude and inter-communion of its love.

#### **His attitude towards man—**

Wordsworth was not only a poet of Nature but he was also the poet of man. With most of the poets man is given more importance than Nature and the latter is described only in relation to man.

But with Wordsworth the case is different. In the main body of his poetry Nature comes first and Man second.

Many influences helped to form his views of man as it was. The French Revolution, especially the view of Rousseau, the poetry of Burns, and his own association with the rustic village folk of Cumberland—all were determining factors. Through his observation of Nature he evolved his philosophy of life, namely, simple life was natural and that which was natural was moral. He appreciated and shared in the simple joys and sorrows of the rustics, whom he believed to be spiritually alive, as they lived in close communion with Nature. The real human nature is to be found in men who lead the simplest lives, and most according to nature. He felt little admiration for the refined life among higher classes, because their false refinements, wayward and artificial desires made them insensible to healthy influences of Nature. For such an one

“A yellow primerose by the river's brim,  
A yellow primerose was to him,  
And it was nothing more”.

And this is the unmistakable sign of spiritual death. His humanity is, therefore, represented only by the rustics. He, no doubt, glorified them and showed much insight and sympathy in understanding them, but they do not constitute the entire humanity. If the rustic life was ignored by the classicists, Wordsworth left out of his poetry the refined life and society altogether. His great service lies in awaking a sense of dignity of man as man, and in showing the way to his moral progress under the influence of Nature.

**His message—**

Wordsworth held that every poem must have "purpose." And of himself he said, "I wish to be considered as a teacher or nothing." This poet-philosopher was ever conscious of his lofty poetic mission, and seldom mentioned a natural phenomenon without moralizing. He was ever spiritualizing the moods of Nature and winning from them moral consolation and quietude. His message is best expressed in his lines—

"One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can."

Morley does not agree with the underlying idea of these lines, but Raleigh holds that "they are the very corner-stone of Wordsworth's poetry, and no more." These lines can be fully appreciated when we remember that Wordsworth preached the identity of life. Moreover, we are trying to understand Wordsworth's faith without admitting or denying its validity. He really believed that moral lessons and ideas were to be gathered from trees and stones. It was the main part of his teaching. He claimed that his own morality had been so furnished him, and he wrote his poetry to convince other people that what had been true for him could be true for them too. The power of appropriating natural objects so that they become, as it were, a part of one's sentient organism—until all nature, from the tiniest flower to the infinite stars, is seen to be a living thing pulsating with that same life in which we have our being—such a power Wordsworth not only speaks of as a thinker, but develops

within us by his poetry. By some wondrous act of creative power he puts things in such a relation to us that henceforth they live for us. He has shown one thing supremely well, that he has so placed common objects before us that they are no longer mere lifeless things, but have a vital connection with our own existence, and from part of that whole to which we also belong. But one thing in this connection should be remembered that Wordsworth was not a Pantheist. He believed in what way be called Divine Immanence, because the meanest things shared in the honour of the infinite.

This is a beautiful idea, posterity feels more grateful to Wordsworth for another distinguishing quality of his poetry, and it is its 'healing power.' He not only realized the ideal of serenity and of sweet calm for himself but communicated it to others as well. This philosophic calm has been found in Wordsworth's poetry, by the critical and uncritical alike, for the last hundred years. Matthew Arnold in his *Memorial Verses* says:—

“Time may restore us in his course  
 Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force,  
 But where will Europe's latter hour  
 Again find Wordsworth's healing power?”

John Stuart Mill felt the same charm and recorded in his *Autobiography* that from Wordsworth's poems "I seemed to learn what would be the perennial services of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence".

William Watson in *Wordsworth's Grave* gives his verdict thus:

"Rest! 'twas the gift he gave: and peace! the  
the shade  
He spread, for spirits fevered with the sun."

We cannot be sufficiently grateful to Wordsworth for the 'impassioned quietude' and peace of mind his poetry gives us. The world is full of feverish activity, distractions and disappointments, and he alone of all the poets has left a panacea to restore tranquillity in our minds. We turn to him for 'sweet calm' as to the scriptures for solace and comfort. The purpose of poetry according to him is "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy ~~happier~~: to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." His poetry undoubtedly fulfils this high aim and puts us in communion with—

'The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lovely hills.'

#### His theory of Poetic Diction—

Wordsworth was not only a poet he was a critic also. He had his own theory of poetic diction which he propounded in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads (second edition)*. Poetry, for him, takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity, and we find that Wordsworth's method of composing verses depended largely upon material collected by his memory. As regards the language of poetry he held that it should be 'the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'. And as he chose rustic life, in preference to city life, as the proper subject of his poetry, he said that the language should be that of men 'chiefly in rustic and humble life.' He also propounded another new theory that 'there

neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.

Wordsworth not only propounded these theories but in early poems he put them into practice as well. His crusade against the artificial style of the eighteenth century poets logically led him to advocate and adopt simplicity in language, and he formulated the theories mentioned above. But whenever he wrote poems in close adherence to his theories he failed to produce great poetry. His poems became merely versified prosaic things. Fortunately he greatly modified his theories in practice. If he had confined himself to the use of the language of rustics, many of his great poems would have remained dull and bald. This would necessarily have the effect of cutting him off from a large portion of the phrases and figures of speech which have long been regarded as the common inheritance of poets. It was lucky that the language of the rustics progressively disappeared from his work, though he may have continued to believe in history.

Wordsworth's theory was rightly criticised by his friend Coleridge, but it did a great service to poetry by rescuing its language from the artificial and unreal mode of expression, which had been a feature of eighteenth century writers.

### Some Comparisons — 1.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats were all poets of Nature and as poets of the Romantic Revival, their attitude was markedly different from that of the classicists. But even among themselves they differed in their attitude towards and approach to Nature. They were great lovers of Nature. Even a casual reader will immediately

notice how intense and passionate is the feeling with which they regard Nature. Their enthusiasm for it is irrepressible and stirs them like a source of joy newly discovered. Their individual view-points are different but they are masterly.

Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature has already been dealt with. Let us take Coleridge, his friend, collaborator and critic first. He describes the natural phenomena in such a manner that they appear to be supernatural. And this supernatural world is made to appear real as he illuminates it by imagination. It is the quality of blending the natural with the supernatural that gives a peculiar delicacy and dreamy grace to his poetry. For Coleridge Nature was not a conscious spirit. Wordsworth and Shelley have more in common between them. They look upon Nature as a living presence, having a conscious spirit pervading the whole universe. They intellectualise Nature. They are not merely poets of Nature, they are prophets of Nature. They are concerned less to depict than to explain. They both try to find some inner significance in the external phenomena. The spirit pervading Nature is a spirit of thought to Wordsworth and to Shelley it is the spirit of love. Shelley abandons himself to Nature, which represents a vague passionate yearning; Wordsworth conceives Nature as sharing in human joys and sorrows and looks up to it for its healing power. Wordsworth's attitude is sober and rational when he views Nature as a temple for the indwelling spirit; Shelley's is more passionate and ethereal. Contemplation of Nature teaches Wordsworth the lesson of self-restraint and calmness, but in Shelley fiery emotions are aroused. Wordsworth is the poet of brooding contemplation, and Shelley is the poet of imagination.

## THE DAFFODILLS

### Introduction.—

The poem was composed in 1804 at Town-end, Grasmere, in 1804, and was first printed in the *Poems* of 1807, in the series "Moods of my own mind." The origin of the poem is connected with the poet's visit to Gowbarrow Park, Ullswater, where the daffodils were seen on April 15, 1802. Wordsworth wrote: "The daffodils grew and still grow on the margin of Ullswater, and probably may be seen to the day as beautiful in the month of March, nodding their golden heads beside the dancing and the foaming waves." Dorothy Wordsworth who accompanied her brother to Ullswater wrote in her Journal under date 15, 1802, as follows: —

"When we were in the woods below Gowbarrow Park we saw a few daffodils close to the water-side. As we went along there were more, and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw there was a long belt of them all along the shore. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about them; some rested their heads on the stones as on a pillow: the rest tossed, and reeled, and danced, and seemed as if they verily danced with the wind that blew upon them over the lake. They looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing."

The poet was occasionally indebted to his sister for subjects, thought images, and sometimes even expressions. His poem shows the extent of her influence upon the poet. It has been truly remarked, "He had a most observant eye; and she also saw for him; and his poems are sometimes like more than poetical versions of her descriptions of the objects which she had seen."

### The substance of the Poem.—

While roaming idly the poet came upon a crowd of golden daffodils, beside a lake, fluttering and dancing to the breeze: Like the milky way they stretched in a long unbroken line along the margin of a bay. And the poet was delighted to see their heads in the breeze. The waves were also dancing with joy but they did not seem to be so merry as the flowers were. He too could not help feeling happy in such a company, and was so much lost in the charming scene that he forgot that he was making himself permanently rich by that sight. Now the flowers flash upon his mind's eye when his mind is blank or sorrowful, and fill it with joy and it begins to dance as merrily as the flowers; whose vision he recollects

In these lines the poet tells us how in his lonely wanderings, he suddenly found the joyous companionship of the daffodils. We learn that nature is a treasure house of joy, and comfort. She gives us sensuous pleasure when her beauty delights us. But we get something more from her. Even when the admired objects of nature are not actually present before our eyes, we can recall their impression upon our mind, and their memory itself becomes a source of lasting joy to us. With the help of this recollection we can chase away

sorrow from our heart and fill it with supreme joy.

### Critical appreciation.—

Wordsworth deliberately chose plain subjects for his poetry which had not been considered fit for poetic treatment. Even the flowers that Wordsworth sings of are generally common, plain and unattractive to people in general. But in his hands they become invested with a surprising charm. Flowers like the daisy and the daffodil inspire in him 'thoughts too deep for tears' and acquire a poetic significance which they were never supposed to possess. His imagination decks them with a fresh beauty, and he seems to share their joys and sorrows. For him they are like living beings and have the power to communicate and reciprocate with human feelings. Invariably he brings out a moral lesson for humanity when he sings of even a neglected wild flower. It proves a source of inspiration to him and affords him opportunities for reflection and teaches philosophic truths of deep significance.

This poem is a melodious expression of Wordsworth's implicit belief that real joy resides only in nature and it is from that source that we can gain philosophic calm. Wordsworth's method of composing poems is also illustrated here. The first stage is of observation, followed by recollection of vivid pictures indelibly impressed upon his memory. These images he loves to dwell upon, and then infuses into them an intellectual life, and then relates them with our feelings and moral sense.

Dowden has beautifully remarked about the poem that it is filled with the laughter and the dance of flowers and waves. Mr. Aubrey de Vere has remarked how little of detail the poem contains—

only 'the margin of a bay and the long galaxy of daffodils' the addition of the details would have injured the singleness of effect. "The poet saw the daffodils because he saw little else, and he saw them in such sort that both for him and his readers henceforth

They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude."

Hutton remarks that "The great beauty of the poem is its wonderful buoyancy, its purely objective way of conveying that buoyancy, and the extraordinary vividness with which the lonely rapture of lonely minds is stamped upon the whole poem." Turner is equally enthusiastic in his praise of the poem when he says, "A second rate poet might have written the first three stanzas of the poem. No one but Wordsworth could have written the last. No other English poet shows so keen a perception of the subtle analogies between the sights and sounds of nature and thoughts and feelings of the mind."

The famous couplet quoted above was suggested by Mrs. Wordsworth and it is a remarkable contribution to his works. But Coleridge condemned the couplet in *Biographia Literaria*—(chapter XXII). He felt that the 'inward eye' should be reserved for the higher uses, for purely mental or spiritual delight. Wordsworth, on the other hand, held these two lines to be the best in the poem. When someone remarked that the poem was "a fine morsel for the Reviewers," the poet observed that "there were *two lines* in that little poem which, if thoroughly felt, would annihilate nine-tenths of the reviews of the kingdom, as they would find no readers." It is, however, certain that few poems

have done so much to increase the enjoyment of natural beauty by suggesting to minds less quick to receive impressions than a poet's that they can indefinitely augment their delight by cultivating the habit of thus remembering—in a spirit different from that of Keats' lyric—'passed joy.' (Fowler). Wordsworth added spiritual meaning to natural beauty, and as an expression of pure delight in such natural beauty *The Daffodils* could not easily be surpassed by any poet.

#### Metre—

In the first lines of the stanza alternate lines rhyme and each line has four accents. The rhythm is iambic. The last two lines of the stanza rhyme in couplets.

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## THE DAFFODILS.

1

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils,  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

2

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay :  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

3

The waves beside them danced, but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee :  
A Poet could not but be gay  
In such a jocund company !  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought ;

## 4

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
    In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
    Which is the bliss of solitude :  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

W. WORDSWORTH.

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## NOTES ON THE DAFFODILS

### 1

1. I wandered lonely as a cloud—the poet compares his lonely wanderings to a floating stray cloud in the sky. In this poem the facts are idealized and Wordsworth's poem is based upon recollected emotions. We must remember, however, that the poet did not wander "lonely as a cloud;" his sister accompanied him. Compare Byron's *Prisoner of Chillon*:—

"Lone, as a solitary cloud,  
A single cloud on a sunny day,  
While all the rest of heaven is clear," etc.

2. That floats on high—stray cloud seems as if suspended in the air over mountains and valleys.

3. When all at once—the poet again departs from facts. The host of daffodils were not at once seen. Miss Wordsworth says, "we saw a few daffodils close to the water side." A sight becomes more impressive by its suddenness. I saw a crowd—"His human loneliness was suddenly broken in upon by a 'crowd.' 'A jocund company'—of natural objects" (Fowler). His sense of loneliness was suddenly dispelled by a large number of daffodils coming all at once into sight. It is a beautiful idea expressive of Wordsworth's feeling towards Nature and his

faith in communion with her. The Daffodils are humanised and are invested with the power of banishing the idea of loneliness from his mind.

4. **A host**—a large number. The idea of ‘crowd’ is again emphasised and the word is ease in apposition with ‘crowd’. **Daffodils**—the initial *d* is not properly the part of the word, the Middle English form being *affodille*; Latin, *asphodelus* and English *asphodel*. It is a yellow coloured flower and hence called ‘golden’.

5. **The lake**—Ullswater.

6. **Fluttering and dancing**—the poet heightens the contrast between himself and the flowers. He was lonely, they were in a crowd: he was pensive and moody, and they were ‘dancing’ in joy, because they were briskly moving in the soft wind expressing joy and animation. In the original edition the last lines of the first stanza ran thus:—

‘A post of dancing daffodils  
Along the like, beneath the trees,  
Ten thousand dancing in the breeze.’

Needless to say that the change has improved the beauty of the stanza. Compare—“that every flower enjoys the air it breathes.”

‘As the poet was wandering alone, like a solitary cloud in the sky floating over valleys and hills, he all of a sudden caught sight of, beside the lake and under the trees, innumerable daffodils moving briskly—in soft breeze,—and they seemed to him as if dancing in joy.’

2

This stanza is not in the original edition. It was an afterthought and was added in the edition of 1815, after which date the text remained unaltered.

7. Continuous—in one big line, unbroken and endless.

8. The stars ... way—the belt of stars that form the galaxy. The flowers are like stars, and their large number immediately suggests their similarity to the milky way.

9. Stretched—extended. Never-ending line—the vividness of the description, like the appropriateness of the comparison with the milky way, is to be noticed. The poet saw the flowers extending in a long unbroken line and not covering a single stretch of ground.

10. The margin of the bay—on the bank of Ullswater.

11. Ten thousand—a very large, but indefinite number.

12. Tossing their heads ... dance—the idea of 'dance' is again repeated. The flowers briskly shaking in the breeze appear to the poet as if enjoying a lively dance.

The flowers were growing in a long unbroken line along the bank of the lake, and the poet compares them to the shining stars that form the milky way. He saw a very large number of them all at once, and moving in the breeze they appeared to be enjoying a lively dance. ✓

### 3

13. The waves besides ....danced—as if the waves were in sympathy with the flowers and were dancing with them. Them—the flowers.

14. Outdid ... in glee—but the flowers surpassed in their mirth the shining waves. The waves were after all, merry with the reflected joy of the flowers. The breeze can disturb the flowers more than it can disturb waves. Wordsworth imbues

'objects of nature with feelings of sympathy and joy and then goes a step further measuring their mirth and joy.

15. A poet could not . . . gay—on such occasions when nature is in a joyous and mirthful mood man cannot but catch that joy himself. 'One impulse can disturb man and nature with joy. And when that man is a poet he can more readily respond to the feelings produced by nature and its beauty. Compare—

(*Intimations of Immortality*).

16. **Jocund company**—the joyful company of dancing flowers and waves. The sense of the 'jocund company' is enhanced by the preceding solitude.

17. I gazed and gazed—as if he was spell bound and could not turn his eyes from the flowers. But little thought—while charmed by the beauty of the sudden sight of flowers, and himself infected with their joyousness, his thinking faculty for the time seem'd to have suspended its function. He was so completely lost in the vivid sensuous experience that he could not then fully realize the value that experience would possess for him afterwards, and that it would leave a permanent impression upon his mind.

18. What wealth . . . brought—the sight had enriched his memory for ever with a delightful vision. The sight was to remain treasured up in memory and prove not only a delightful reminiscence, but a source of inspiration and urge him to write a poem like this. Compare—

"Here I stand not only with the sense  
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
That in this moment there is life and mood for  
future years."

(*Tintern Abbey*).

The waves also seemed to dance with joy as if in sympathy with the flowers on the bank. But the dancing of the flowers seemed to indicate more joy. The poet too could not but be happy in such a company. So he gazed upon the sight for a long time and at that time failed to realize how he was enriching himself with a delightful memory for ever.

#### 4.

19. **For**—he has now realized what he failed to when the sight was actually before his eyes. **When on my . . . lie**—and not actually see the admired object of nature.

20. **In vacant or in pensive mood**—in idle, unoccupied moments, or when he is moody or thoughtful, but not distracted.

21-22. **They flash upon . . . of solitude**—these two admirable lines—according to Wordsworth, the two best lines in the poem—were contributed by Mary Wordsworth, the poet's wife. For Coleridge's criticism on them see the Introduction to the poem. The lines mean—"These flowers suddenly appear before my mind's eye and their recollection gives me highest pleasure in solitude when my mind is not distracted". It is the recollection of each sights that turns solitude into a bliss. **The flash upon**—suddenly and vividly are recalled to memory. **That inward eye**—the mind's eye or memory. The sight is gone but it leaves behind a pleasant recollection.

"Which is the bliss of solitude—the recollection of sensuous experiences makes our solitude and retirement within ourselves a source of happiness. Solitude would become unbearable if our memory did not present to our mind the blissful scenes which once we saw with our eyes. Compare—

"Bliss in possession will not last:  
 Remembered joys are never past:  
 At once the fountain, stream and sea,  
 They were—they are—they yet shall be."  
 (J. Montgomery, *The Little Cloud*).

Wordsworth, in *'To the Highland Girl of Inver-*  
*said* writes :—

"In spots like these it is we prize  
 Our memory, feel that she hath eyes."

And in *Tintern Abbey*—

"When thy mind  
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,  
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place  
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies."

23-24. And then my . . . . daffodils—when I recollect the sight of joyous flowers and see them with the mind's eye, my heart becomes filled with joy and becomes as merry as the 'dancing' daffodils. The poet feels the power of nature to impart its moods to man. This is what Wordsworth believed and delivered as his message to mankind. He expresses a similar idea in *Tintern Abbey* and speaking about the 'beauteous forms' writes :—

I have owned to them,  
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,

Felt in the blood and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind,  
With tranquil restoration”

This is the healing power of nature to which the poet often refers in his works.

Often when the poet lies on his couch with a blank mind or in a sorrowful mood the flowers suddenly appear before his mind's eye and make his solitude a source of great happiness. Such recollections fill his heart with joy and then he feels as happy as the dancing flowers. / =

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## THE SOLITARY REAPER

### Introduction—

The poem was composed between 1803 and 1805, and was first published in 1807. It was included in the group of poems entitled "Memorials of a Tour in Scotland" (1827), a tour that was made by the poet, his sister and Coleridge in 1803. In Dorothy Wordsworth's *Recollections* of the Tour, September 13, 1803, we find: "As we descended the scene became more fertile. It was harvest-time, and the fields were quietly—might I be allowed to say pensively?—enlivened by small companies of reapers. It is not uncommon in the more lonely parts of the Highland to see a single person so employed. The tour in Scotland by Thomas Wilkinson, a friend and neighbour of Wordsworth, also influenced this poem. In a note appended to the poem Wordsworth wrote: "This Poem was suggested by a beautiful sentence in a 'Tour in Scotland' written by a friend, the last line being taken from it *verbatim*." The sentence referred to occurs in Wilkinson's *Tours to the British Mountains*: "Passed a female who was reaping alone: she sung in Erse, as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard: her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more."

### The substance of the Poem—

During his tour in Scotland the poet happened

to pass by a field where he saw a solitary Highland girl reaping the harvest and singing all the while a song of exquisite charm. The poet could not understand the words of the song yet he found it very captivating in sweetness, and its haunting music remained in his heart for a long time. We may analyse the poem thus: A solitary Highland girl sings a melancholy strain while reaping (St. 1). The poet is captivated by the sweetness of this music and feels that the song is sweeter than that of the nightingale or the cuckoo (St. 2). As the song is in Erse the poet cannot understand its meaning and, yearning to know it, guesses the theme. (St. 3). Irrespective of the theme the song is exquisite and its melody echoes in the poet's heart long after the song was heard (St. 4).

### Critical Appreciation—

Wordsworth's tours in Scotland inspired some of his best short poems. This poem of imagination is one of them. It is interesting to note that he met no such reaper and no such song was heard by the poet. Slight suggestions were received by reapers working in fields, and also by a sentence of Wilkinson in the description of his tour. An insignificant fact and poetic imagination blended together have produced this beautiful piece. It is a charming bit of romantic musing started by the impression made on the poet's mind by the loneliness of the reaper and the touch of melancholy in her song.

Like so many other smaller lyrics of Wordsworth this poem also illustrates the poet's profound love for Nature and his belief that natural surroundings and people born and brought up among them come up to the heavenly beauty, which no conventional life can ever attain. The theme is simple and the style

admirably keeps pace with its simplicity. The sweet and pathetic piece appeals to the heart of the reader. In a few masterly touches and the fewest possible words the poet's impression<sup>s</sup> is vividly brought home to us. All lovers of poetry know this poem and it possesses the great poetic quality of 'memorableness' which is due to the magical quality of its phrasing. Simplest words of every day use have produced a matchless music as if by witchery. Wordsworth's ear had a fine sensibility to the sounds of Nature, but it was not capable of much musical delight. It is surprising, therefore, to find in this poem, as Mr. W. A. Heard has written, the singer's voice "becomes almost a part of nature, working a human sweetness into the landscape . . . We feel the song to be the very soul of the valley."

No other poem of Wordsworth's has so much verbal magic as *The Solitary Reaper*. It seems to us that mere thinking could never have discovered such haunting enchantments of 'old, unhappy far-off things' or 'breaking the silence of the seas.' The words transport us beyond their meaning, suggest much more than what they say and allow us, as it, a glimpse of unknown regions. The authentic note of romanticism is clearly sounded in the poem and we find in it "a suggestiveness reaching far beyond the obvious meaning of the words into depths that speech cannot plumb, mystery, poignancy, pathos, haunting melody" (Fowler). It is no exaggeration to say that it is one of the most perfect and beautiful pieces of poetry that Wordsworth ever wrote.

#### **Metre—**

The rhythm is iambic and each line has four accents with a variation of three accents in the fourth line of every stanza. The first four lines of the stanza rhyme alternately, but the last four lines

form two couplets. This arrangement has made the verse far lovelier than the couplet or alternate rhymes alone could make. It is a noteworthy feature that the alternate rhymes cease in the last stanza, and the demand of the ear is met by the rhymes "ending" and "bending."

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## NOTES ON THE SOLITARY REAPER

### 1

**Single in the field**—“it is not uncommon in the more lonely parts of the Highlands to see a single person so employed,” wrote Dorothy Wordsworth, **Single—alone.**

**Reaping . . . by herself**—cutting the harvest and singing all alone. The poet has emphasised her loneliness by the use of words, ‘single,’ ‘solitary,’ ‘by herself,’ and ‘alone’ even in the first five lines. We think of Shelley’s Skylark who, ‘singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.’ **Stop here? . . . pass**—the poet addressing an imaginary companion or passer by whose attention he invited to the solitary reaper in the opening words, ‘Behold her,’ says that he should not disturb her song. Either he should stop and hear the song or go away quietly, without disturbing or inviting the attention of the reaper. At present she is unaware of the presence near by of these strangers; if she knew that they were listening to her music, she may either stop singing or the song may lose its charm by the consciousness of the reaper that somebody was listening. **Gently**—quietly; without making any noise. **Alone** she . . . the sound—Fowler points out that the hidden alliteration helps to account for the wonderful music

## 2.

**Nightingale**—literally the ‘singer of the night;’ the bird that sings at night. It is a southern bird. **Chaupt**—sing passionately. **Welcome notes**—refreshing and soothing songs. **Weary bands**—groups of travellers fatigued by journey. Originally Wordsworth wrote the line: “So sweetly to reposing band.” **Shady haunt**—oasis in the Arabian deserts. **No nightingale . . . sands**—the song of the nightingale appears very sweet to the travellers fatigued by journey and resting in an oasis of the Arabian deserts. **Thrilling**—enthralling or piercing. **Cuckoo-bird**—the nightingale is the bird of the south and warmer climates, and the cuckoo is of the north. Wordsworth often mentions this bird in his poems and at one place he refers to the “thousand delightful feelings connected in his mind with the voice of the cuckoo.” Compare his lines in the poem *To the Cuckoo*:—

“Not the whole warbling grove in concert heard  
 When sunshine follows shower, the breast can  
 thrill  
 Like the first summons, Cuckoo! of thy bill.”

**Breaking the silence of the seas**—the note of the cuckoo heard over the still waters of otherwise stormy seas, encircling the Hebrides, has a charm of its own as it announces the advent of spring time. “Those who have had the good fortune to sail among the Hebrides in calm weather will understand the beauty and truth of expression, ‘the silence of the seas.’ (Fowler). Compare—

“And we did speak only to break  
 The silence of the seas.”

(Coleridge: *Ancient Mariner*.)

**Will no one tell me . . . sings?**—the poet does not mention that the song was in Erse. He did not know that tongue and could not understand the song. But he has made an exquisite use of the question form. He is passionately moved by the sweet strain, and how much more he would have been moved only if he knew what the song meant. **What she sings?**—the poet is still under the spell of her song. Perhaps—as there is nobody to interpret the song to the poet, he tries to guess, the theme himself. **Plaintive numbers**—sad notes. **Numbers**—poetry or poetic rhythm. From Lat. *Numeri*, verses; *Numerous*, musical measure. Flow for—are prompted by. The theme of the song being. Things—events.

Perhaps the plaintive . . . long ago—the poet guesses that the melancholy song may perhaps centre round some unhappy incident, or long forgotten event such as deadly battle or family feud. These lines (and more especially 19—20) have been quoted as containing in an unusual degree that new

romantic note which was struck by the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. They are "the most memorable and characteristic of the imperishable lines that the Romantic Revival gave to English literature. They are full of the suggestiveness of a devotion to something afar from the sphere of our arrow." The secret of their power may lie in the theory that no part of our experience is really forgotten but remains hidden in our sub-consciousness; it is even held by some that the experience of our ancestors is dormant in us too. Words rhythmically musical may have the power to stir the sub-conscious memories that correspond to them and so to give us a sense not of their present limited meaning but of an infinite past" (Lamborn). **Or is it some... of today?** or the theme of the reaper's song is some humble incident of every day life? **Familiar matter of today**—ordinary misfortunes of every day occurrence which befall mankind. **Some natural sorrow**—sorrow which comes out of the natural course of things, and therefore inevitable **Natural**—ordinary, which might be expected to happen in ordinary course. **Loss or pain**—death and suffering. **That has been ... again**—which has befallen in the past and which may happen again and again. For Wordsworth ordinary events of life were not without their poetic significance and he found them quite fit subjects for his poetry.

The poet is so charmed by the reaper's song that he yearns to know its meaning and theme. But as there is none to explain, and himself not knowing the language, he guesses what the song may mean. Of one thing, however, he is, certain that there is a touch of melancholy in her strains and the song is replete with delicate pensiveness. The theme may be some old historical incident

Whatever the theme—it is immaterial whether

it was correct in his guess as regards the  
use of the song, but one thing he undoubtedly

Could have no ending—she would go on sing-

g eternally. The poet while under the spell of the song could not think that the enchanting song could not go on for ever. He was so rapt in music that he lost all idea of the passage of time. Browning in *The Last Ride together* express the idea thus: "That instant turned into infinity." There is one more reason why the poet felt that the song would never come to an end. Its sweet melody will always resound in his memory. I saw her . . . bending—the reaper was singing and at the same time was reaping the harvest. 'Reaping and singing by herself. I listened . . . still—originally the line was "I listen'd till I had my fill." The poet heard the song silently, as if spell bound, and without the least motion. He asked the passer by also, 'stop here, or gently pass!' As I mounted . . . till—when he left the valley after the reaper had ceased to sing, The music in my heart . . . no more—he remembered the sweet melody of the song long after it had stopped. Wordsworth delighted in recollecting and dwelling upon the sensuous perceptions which he had actually experienced. His memory was a "dwelling place" for all sweet sounds and lovely sights. Just as the daffodils

"flash upon that inward eye

Which is the bliss of solitude"

even so the melody of the reaper's song and its sweetness linger in his heart and remain treasured there.

The poet listened to the reaper's song as long as she sang, and for the time being, he remained so rapt in it, independently of the theme, that it seemed endless to him. He remained perfectly motionless and still while the song was going on. At its close he left the valley and went up the hill and still the sweet melody continued to resound in his heart.

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**deep**—definite and profound. ~~ect~~ **n**—have an imperfect idea of; have vague ~~Frm~~as only. **Crystal stream**—unbroken current of ~~g~~hi <sup>a</sup>ess.

The poet has suggested in the last stanza that unchanging love is probably the source of inspiration for the exquisite song of the lark. Now he suggests another, and it is, that the bird has a correct knowledge of the mystery of death, where as we have it not, and so it is a cause of terror to us. Perhaps the bird knows that death is nothing but a gate way to a happier life, and so its song is not troubled by its fear. Man is always in fear of death and therefore cannot produce a perfect song like that of the lark.

The song of the bird would not have been so consistently full of rapture at all times and in all seasons if its intuitions about death had not been deeper and truer than man's, for to man death is an over shadowing mystery.

## 18

**Before and after**—past and future. Pine for what is not—yearn for things which we do not possess, and so are always unhappy and discontented. Our present lot never satisfies us and passionately desire what we lack. We look before .. what is not—we think of what was in the past but is not, and we think of what is now but may not be in the future and yearn for unrealized things. The result is, that we cannot be perfectly happy. It was a characteristic of Shelley that he always longed for the unattainable perfection, and the concrete realities did not appeal so much to his imagination as vague ideals did. It is one of the most frequently quoted passages from Shelley's poems.

Compare—

"Surely that is [ ] le us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and god-like reason  
To trust in us unseel?"

(*Hamlet*, IV. 4.37).

Burns in his *To a Field Mouse* writes—

"Still thou art blest, compar'd wi' me :  
The present only toucheth thee :  
But och ! I backward cast my e'e  
On prospects drear,  
And forward, tho' I canna see,  
I guess and fear !"

One more passage may be recalled from Gray's *Ode on the Pleasures arising from Vicissitude*—

"Their raptures now that wildly flow  
No yesterday nor morrow know :  
'Tis man alone that joy desires  
With forward and reverted eyes."

Our sincerest laughter.... fraught—our purest mirth and enjoyment is not without an alloy of sorrow. The moments of greatest joy are clouded with sorrow. In *Atlanta in Calydon* Swinburne says :—

"Before the beginning of years  
There came to the making of man  
Pleasure, with pain for leaven".

Man is not fated to be perfectly happy; sorrow is the most abiding feeling. **Fraught**—filled. Our sweetest songs . **saddest thought**—when sorrow is the most abiding feeling, it is natural that the songs, which most touch our hearts, because they harmonise with our experience, are those which express our sorrow and suffering. The most tragic songs give us the greatest delight. Our sweetest songs proceed from tragic themes and sufferings of human life. Tragedy is regarded as superior to comedy and delights more than comic scenes. “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (*Merchant of Venice*). Shelley writes in his *Defence of Poetry* :—“Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle: tragedy delights by affording a shadow of that pleasure which exists in pain. This is the source also of the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody. The pleasure that is in sorrow is sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself”.

The poet in the last two stanzas told us the reason of the sweetness of the lark’s song. It is beyond man’s power to attain that sweetness and the reason for it is given in this stanza.

We can never be happy in life. When we look to the past its sweet recollections make us sorrowful; if we look to the future we find it gloomy. The present we cannot enjoy as our many wants and unrealized dreams, vague longings, stand in the way of our making the best of what we have. Joy and sorrow exist side by side in our life. Even in our sincerest laughter there is always an under current of grief. Our sweetest songs are those which give utterance to our melancholy and sorrow.

would hear the poet's song with rapt attention, as he now hears the song of the bird.

The last two stanzas bring out a comparison between the poet and the skylark. The poet soars in the regions of imagination, the bird flies high up in the sky, and so both are scorers of the ground. Both are singers and are filled with gladness, and sing to the delight of the world.

The poet asks the skylark to inspire him with its song and joy. If he could get a small portion of the joy that the skylark feels, he would write poetry which would charm the world, as he himself is charmed by the song of the bird.

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## ODE TO THE WEST WIND.

### Introduction —

This poem was written in the autumn of 1819 when Shelley was barely 27 years old. He writes: "This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temprature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightening peculiar to the Cisalpine regions.

"The phenomenon alluded at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers and of lakes, sympathises with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it." It was published with *Prometheus Unbound* and other poems in 1820.

### Argument—

The poem is an invocation to the west wind when it is fiercely blowing on the earth, in the sky and on the sea. The strength and violence of the wind bring to the poet's mind the consciousness of his own limitations and helplessness. He invokes the wind to impart its strength to him, identify him

with itself and make him its lyre. This will impart him power to prophecy the regeneration of the world. Leslie Stephen writes: "These magical verses describe the reflection of the poet's mind in the strange commotion of a wintry day. He represent the fitful melancholy which oppresses a noble spirit when it has recognized the difficulty of forcing facts into conformity with the ideal. He still clings to the hope that his dead thoughts may be driven over the universe like withered leaves to quicken into new birth. But he bows before the inexorable fate which has cramped his energies."

### Appreciation—

Shelley's longer poems generally lack in that ultimate form of perfection which we admire in shorter pieces like the *Ode to the West Wind* which he composed with all his faculties, mental, emotional and physical, at the utmost strain, at a white heat of intense fervour. And thus he gave the truest and most passionate utterance to the thoughts which inflamed his ever-quick imagination. His finest work, consequently, is not a mere artistic production; it has something elemental and natural about it which only a rare genius can impart.

The Ode is recognized as one of Shelley's most perfect pieces, and it is perhaps the greatest of his lyrics. It is instinct with high poetic imagination. Its nervous delicacy and overflowing imagination lift it to an undisputed pinnacle of artistic excellence. It has been rightly called the "matchless Ode", as Wordsworth's is called "the immortal Ode." It is, undoubtedly, the most symmetrically perfect as well as the most impassioned of his minor lyrics. The words are adopted to the subject in a remarkable manner, the music of the lines is perfect

and the diction keeps pace with its harmony. The process of the wind has been most accurately and vividly described, at the same tune it has been given a symbolic significance for the poet's personal feelings, who yearns to be as free and strong as the wind, so that we may transcend all his limitafions. Shelley displays wonderful power of personifying the different aspects of Nature. With an amazing rapidity pictures and metaphors follow one another and yet, at the end of the poem, the impression created upon our mind is of perfect unity. The wind is the symbol of the poet's tumultuous mind, only the one is free and strong, and the other is restless and proud though chained. The poem is the supreme product of the titanic energy and impulsive nature of Shelley's mind. We admire the poem with breathless adoration and at times we are not allowed breathing time when caught in the exuberance of metaphores and similies. The overprofusion of metaphor in *The Skylark* mars its beauty to a certain extant but here it leaves us completely lost in its beauty and wealth.

### Critical Remarks—

( 1 )

The greatest of these lyrics, *The Ode to the West Wind*, combines with the highest degree this imaginative quality the two other characteristics notes of Shelley's lyrics personal (despondency) and prophetic passion. He faints and fails like a 'dead leaf' as in the *Indian Screnade* he could lie down 'like a tired child' as in the *Naples Stanza*, he is a 'frail form, a stranger among man' as in the *Adonais*. But these faltering accents become trumpet tones as soon as he utters, not his own sorrows, but the woes of men. Then the weary child becomes the

prophet and 'the devil leaf' lifted by the wind, becomes the lyre which awakens in it 'the tumult of mighty harmonies' to quicken the sleeping world to new birth. Byron had longed to be 'a portion of the storm,' but only in order to share its 'fierce and far delight,' to be the comrade of its ruinous splendour. Shelley calls upon it as the farsweeping preserver of the seeds of the future, the herald of spring which, when winter comes cannot be far behind.

*Herford.*

( 2 )

The emotion awakened by the approaching storm sets on fire other sleeping emotions in his heart, and the whole of his being bursts into flame around the first emotion. This is the manner of the genesis of all his noblest lyrics. He passes from magnificent union of himself with Nature and magnificent realization of her storm and peace to equally great self-description, and then minglest all nature and all himself together, that we may sing of the restoration of mankind. There is no song in the whole of our literature more passionate, more penetrative, more full of the force by which the idea and its form are united into one creation.

The last thought now been reached, the last realm over which the wind is sweeping. It has passed through forests of earth, through the clouds, the sky, into the depths of ocean, through the lands and sky and ocean of Shelley's heart; and now, at the very point and climax of emotion, it gives himself and sweeps through all mankind, bearing away with it dead things and the seeds of the new out of the personal Shelley passes into the universal, and at that moment future opened to him. Beyond the storm, beyond the winter it

ushers in, he sees the new-awakened world, the birth of all seeds, the outburst as of a spring in humanity;

O wind,

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

This is the lyric of lyrics. It is the hymn of our own world. It ought to be set to music by a great musician, but he should have the genius of Beethoven "Ineffuctual Angel!" Indeed, nay rather, Impassionating angel!

*Stopford A. Brooke.*

( 3 )

There is a marked contrast between the magnificence of Shelley's diction in his longer poems and such lyrics as the *Ode to the West Wind* and the simplicity of the shorter lyrics such as *The Indian Serenade* or 'One Word is too often Profaned.' His poetry is rich in such occasional pieces, in which the emotion of the heart takes form in words without effort. Nor has any other English poet sung to one clear harp in so many diverse tones. Arriving at maturity as it were in a moment, he found the entire resources of lyric poetry at his disposal. His verse, responsive to the influence of every mood, trembles and sighs with alternating despondency and hope. In the *Ode to the West Wind* it moves to stately music; wrapped in a garment of splendid imagery.

*A. H. Thompson.*

( 4 )

Perhaps the greatest of all Shelley's lyrics. The verse sweeps along with the elemental rush of the wind it celebrates. Metaphor succeeds to metaphor, and simile to simile, with wild rapidity; but though

## ODE TO THE WEST WIND

(1)

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves  
dead

Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter  
fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes : O thou 5

Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within its grave, until

Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill 10  
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)

With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;

Destroyer and Preserver; hear, oh, hear!

(2)

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's com-  
motion, 15

Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and  
Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning : there are spread  
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head 20

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge  
 Of the horizon to the zenith's height,  
 The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge  
 Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
 Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,        25  
 Vaulted with all thy congregated might  
 Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
 Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: oh, hear!

## (3)

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams  
 The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,        30  
 Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,  
 Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,  
 And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
 Quivering within the wave's intenser day,  
 All overgrown with azure moss and flowers        35  
 So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
 For whose path the Atlantic's level powers  
 Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know        40  
 Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,  
 And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

## (4)

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share        45  
 The impulse of thy strength, only less free

Than thou, O uncontrollable ! If even  
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be  
 The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,  
 As then, when to outstrip thy skyey speed 50  
 Scarce seemed a vision, I would no'er have striven  
 As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
 Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud !  
 I fall upon the thorns of life ! I bleed ! 54  
 A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed  
 One too like thee : tameless, and swift, and proud.

(5)

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
 What if my leaves are falling like its own !  
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies  
 Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone, 60  
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
 My spirit ! Be thou me, impetuous one !  
 Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
 Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth !  
 And, by the incantation of this verse, 65  
 Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind !  
 Be through my lips to unawakened earth  
 The trumpet of a prophecy ! O Wind,  
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ? 70

## NOTES ON ODE TO THE WEST WIND

### 1

1. **Thou breath of Autumn's being**—the life or spirit of autumn : what breath of life is to human beings the west wind is to autumn. Wind and 'breath' being both air, the metaphor is quite appropriate.

2. **From whose unseen presence**—though the wind is unseen yet its rush is powerful enough.

3. **Like ghosts fleeing**—the leaves are dried and blown away by the west wind, just as ghosts fly away before an enchanter. The unseen wind is compared to an enchanter; the one is invisible and so is the magical power of the other. The dead leaves are also most appropriately compared to ghosts. Mr. Fowler points out the rapidity with which the verses here move and the quick succession of metaphors and similes. **Dead**—to be joined with 'are driven,' and not with 'leaves.' The construction is 'leaves are driven dead,' and not 'dead leaves are driven.'

4. **Yellow, and black etc.**—the withered leaves of autumn, of various colours. All of them have not dried up equally. **Hectic red**—unhealthy flush on the face of a consumptive is compared to the redness of leaves which are about to decay. This redness is not the sign of health but indicates that

decay is about to set in. **Hectic**—feverish; consumptive.

**5. Pestilence multitudes**—the decaying leaves, driven away by the wind, are compared to people suffering from some plague and driven away from their town by pestilence.

**6. Chariotest**—swiftly conveys. The wind will be described as the destroyer and then as the preserver. It drives away dead leaves like plague-stricken people and at the same time carries away swiftly and safely seeds to germinate at the proper time. The word 'chariotest' conveys the idea of careful transportation, in contrast with driving.

**The dark wintry bed**—cold underground recesses where the seeds lie well protected throughout winter.

**7. The winged seeds**—some seeds have fibres on them which the poet compares to wings, helping the wind to carry them swiftly. Compare—'The blasts of autumn drive the winged seed's. (*Shelley's The Revolt of Islam*) **Where they lie cold and low**—the seeds carried by the wind remain underground 'in then dark wintry bed' undisturbed till the time of germination.

**8. Each like . . grave**—the seeds lie inert underground like dead bodies in the grave. It is a beautiful comparison as the Christians believe that the dead would rise from their graves on the day of Judgment so will the seeds germinate in spring-time.

**9. Thine azure sister of the spring**—zephyr, the spring breeze which blows under a clear blue sky. It is appropriately called the sister of the west wind because both blow from the same direction. **Azure**—blue clear sky. Compare—'soothed by every azure

breath' (Shelley : *The Recollection*). Shall blow—the noise produced by the spring breeze is compared to the sounding of a trumpet.

10 Her clarion earth—the spring breeze blows her trumpet to awaken the sleeping earth. The earth is sleeping because after autumn comes the winter season, under the freezing influence of which, the earth without vegetation seems to be sleeping. The seeds have been compared to dead men lying in their graves, and just as there would be Resurrection of the dead on the day of Judgment by the Trumpet of the Doom, so will the sound of the spring breeze will bring about resurrection of Nature, quicken life in seeds and revive freshness of springtime. Compare—

"Earth is a wintry clod ;  
But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress,  
passes—  
Over its meat to waken it."

(Browning : *Paracelsus*).

11. Driving sweet ... air—it is a metaphor within a metaphor. As a shepherd leads his flock from the fold into the pasture grounds so the spring wind drives the buds out of the seeds, enclosing the bud, into the open air. When the resurrection of Nature would take place in spring, the buds will open into flowers. Here the spring wind is the shepherd, the seeds are the sheep, the open air is the pasture land and the buds are the folds of sheep.

12. Living hues and odours—vivid bright colours of flowers and their fragrance. They are in contrast with the 'yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red' leaves of the autumn season.

shable and so heaven and ocean, compared to trees,  
are interwoven and have tangl'd boughs.

18. Angels of rain and lightning—messengers of  
rain and lightning. ‘Angels’ has been used here  
in the original sense of the word. Clouds are the  
messengers of the approaching rain and lightning.

15-18. Thou on whose lightning—The descrip-  
tion is of an approaching storm. Just as decay-  
ing leaves are scattered on the stream of water by  
the wind, so the west wind has scattered patches of  
clouds, as if shaken from the sky and ocean, which  
imperceptibly mingle at the horizon: and these  
clouds are like the messengers of the approaching  
storm, accompanied with rain and lightning.

18. Spread—the subject of this verb are the  
wings—‘The locks of the approaching storm’ in  
line 23.

19. Blue surface of thene airy surge—the blue  
atmosphere of the air in motion. Airy surge—waves  
of air. Here the sky is indirectly called a sea

20. Like the bright head—the bright clouds  
appear like dishevelled hair on the head.

21. Fierce Maenad—the Maenads were the  
female votaries of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine  
and revelry. The adjective fierce is appropriate as  
the Maenads became frenzied and frantic when  
drunk. The name literally means ‘the frenzied wo-  
men’ from their strange dress and wild dances. Mr.  
Palgrave thinks it to be the most vivid, sustained,  
and impassioned amongst all Shelley’s magical  
personifications of Nature. Dim verge—indistinct  
hue of the horizon.

22. The zenith’s height—the highest point of  
the sky. That is through the whole sphere of the

sky. **Zenith**—is a word of Arabic origin and means the vertical point of the sky.

23. **The locks of . . . storm**—clouds are described here as locks of hair of storm

18-23. **There ere spread . . . approaching storm**—the storm clouds which are spread over the whole of the blue sky, from the horizon to the highest point, appear like the dishevelled tresses of hair on the head of some frenzied Maenad.

23-24. **Thou dirge . . . year**—the west wind is a song of lamentation for the expiring year. The howling of the west wind compared to a funeral song because it announces the approach of winter when all vegetation dies out. The year is imagined to be dying and not dead because it is still autumn. **Dirge**—from the first word of the anthem “Dirige Dominus mens” in the Latin office for the dead.

24. **Closing night**—the night which is closing in and not the last night of the year.

25.—**Dome of a vast sepulchre**—the sky of the dark night will form the dome of the tomb in which the dying year would be buried.

26. **Vaulted with . . . of vapours**—the vault of the sepulchre will be formed by the dense masses of clouds. **Congregated vapours**—the mass of vapours borne by the west wind and formed into clouds. We have in *Hamlet*. “This most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilential *congregation of vapours*.” **Solid atmosphere**—dense thick body. ‘Solid’ is not to be interpreted in its literal sense. It is called solid because dense clouds and vapours make it look like a solid wall.

28. Black rain—rain appearing black on account of the surrounding darkness. Fire—thunder and lightning.

23-28. Thou dirge of the.... will burst—the expiring year will soon die and the howling west wind seems to sound the funeral hymns. The night that is closing in with darkness will form the dome of the tomb, in which the dying year will be buried, and the dense mass of vapours borne by the west wind and turned into clouds, will form its vault, and from this vault, enveloped with darkness, rain, lightning, hail and thunder will burst upon the earth. O, hear!—the invocation to the west wind is continued.

Shelley again describes the west wind while imploring it to hear his message. Just as the decaying leaves fall from the trees and are carried away by the swift current of a stream, so loose clouds driven by violent atmospheric commotion and agitated wind seem to be shaken down from heaven and ocean like trees with interwoven branches. Heaven and ocean are compared to trees. These clouds are the messengers of rain and lightning as they indicate the approach of storm. They spread on the blue atmosphere of the whole sky, from the indistinct horizon to the highest point, and appear, like the dishevelled tresses of hair on the head of some frenzied Maenad, as locks of hair of the coming storm. Again, the west wind indicates the closing in of the night, and the howling sound it produces seems to be the funeral song of the year that will expire soon. At night the thick darkness will be the dome of the tomb in which the dying year will be buried and the mass of vapours absorbed by the west wind and formed into clouds will form its

loose clouds fly like Maenads, their locks blown forward by the wind, and the wind itself is the dirge of the year, the impersonated sorrow of all that has been, but which now it destroys. For in this verse that side of the west wind which makes it the Destroyer, and not the Preserver, the God that slays rather than saves, is given" (*Stopford Brooke*).

## 3

29. **Waken from the summer dreams**—the summer being free from tempest the sea was calm, but winter brings rain and storm and the sea is lashed into violent waves. **Summer dreams**—refers to the quiet surface of the sea in summer. The calmness of the sea suggests the idea of dreaming.

31. **Lulled by the streams**—the clear transparent waters, and the tumult of their ebb and flow induced the sleep of the sea. **Coil**—‘tumult’, referring here to the noise of the tide. (*Thompson*). The gentle roll of the transparent waves in their winding course. **Crystalline**—clear as crystal. The accent here is on the penultimate syllable. **Streams**—tides.

32. **Pumice isle in Baiae's bay**—not far from Naples, Baiae was a favourite haunt of the Romans in olden times, by reason of its warm springs and delightful situation. They built many fine palaces and towers on the coast. It was destroyed by an eruption of Vesuvius.

Now the bay, which is to the north-west of the Bay of Naples, is called the Golfs di Pozzuoli. Vesuvius being near the place many islands have formed in the bay by the deposites of the volcanic lava. The whole of the district near Naples is volcanic. **Punice**—a kind of lava. “Here”, says

Shelley of the gulf of Pozzuoli, "are lofty rocks and craggy islets, with arches and portals of precipice standing in the sea, and enormous caverns, *which echoed faintly with the languid tide.*" The last words explain line 31.

33. **Saw in sleep . . . towers**—the mediterranean sea which is personified here is described as looking into its own waters in a dream, and watching the palaces and towers submerged in water by volcanic eruptions. Eustace says of the bay: "It is lined with ruins, the remains of the villas and the baths of the Romans: some advance a considerable way out, and though now under the waves are easily distinguishable in fine weather". (*Classical Tour*).

34. **Quivering . . . day**—the submerged palaces and towers of the old city of Baiae, which can be seen under water, appear to be trembling by the gentle motion of the waves in the brighter translucency of the water. Objects seen under clear water possess a peculiar brightness. "The translucency of the water is more intense than the dazzling light of the day above its surface" (*Thompson*).

This picture is a favourite one with Shelley. Compare—

"And here within the surface of the river  
The shadows of the massy temples lie,  
And never are erased, but tremble ever  
Like things which every cloud can doom to die".

(*The Witch of Atlas*).

In *Ode to Liberty* there is a similar idea:

"Within the surface of Time's fleeting river  
Its wrinkled image lies, as then it lay,

Immovably unquiet, and for ever  
It trembles, but it cannot pass away".

35. All overgrown . . . and flowers—the submerged palaces and towers were overgrown with marine vegetation and thick moss on which flowers grow. Compare the following lines from *Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples*:

"I see the deep's untrampled floor  
With green and purple sea weeds strown".

36. The sense faints them!—the sea-flowers are so beautiful and fragrant that our senses are overpowered and swoon away even when we try to realize their beauty and scent in own mind. Compare—

Like a rose embower'd  
In its own green leaves,  
By warm winds deflower'd  
Till the scent it gives  
Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-wing'd thieves".

(*To a Skylark*).

37. The Atlantic's level powers—smooth waters of the ocean in the calm weather. 'Level' is meant for the Atlantic and is transferred to 'powers'.

38. Cleave themselves in chasms—the smooth surface of the Atlantic ocean is parted, making deep hollows and providing a passage for the west wind. That is the wind rushing upon the ocean disturbs it violently and breaks its level surface into high billows. Far below—in the depth of the sea.

39. Sea blooms—sea flowers. Oozy woods—submarino forests and vegetation. Oozy—moist,

because always under water. Compare Milton's lines :

"With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves"  
(*Lycidas*).

"And bid the weltering waves their oozy  
channel keep".

(*Ode on Nativity*).

40. The **sapless foliage**—sea-weeds and other vegetation being steeped in water have no sap or fluid running in them.

41. **Know thy voice**—respond to the approaching west wind. **And suddenly grow . . . fear**—the sea-weeds change their colour in autumn and so the poet imagines that on account of the fear of the west wind they turn pale. See Shelley's note in the Introduction on the phenomenon well-known to naturalists.

42. **And tremble and despoil themselves**—not only the vegetation is filled with fear at the advancing west wind and turns pale, but the leaves drop from the stalks and the petals from flowers and the sea-weeds seem to tremble with fear.

The west wind awakens the Mediterranean which was sleeping peacefully in summer, lulled by the gentle ebb and tide of its clear water beside some pumice island in the bay of Baiae. Perchance the sea was dreaming of past scenes and of palaces and towers of the submerged city which are now sparkling under the brighter light of the inner surface of the water, and appear trembling under the waves. The submerged buildings are overgrown with moss and weeds and the fragrance of their flowers is so sweet that our senses fall into a swoon even when we think of them. The level and smooth surface of

the Atlantic ocean parts forming deep hollows as if to make passage for the west wind. The Mediterranean is just ruffled and the Atlantic is thrown into high billows by the rush of the wind. Even the vegetation, moist and sapless at the bottom of the sea does not remain unaffected at the approach of the wind. It seems to realize the advance of the wind, turns pale with fear and trembling sheds its leaves and flowers. Such is the west wind which the poet invokes.

In this stanza the wind is at first the giver of life, the Preserver: and then the Destroyer. "The wind wakens now the blue Mediterranean, for we have passed from the forest, from the wind on the earth, from the wind in the sky, to the wind upon the sea. He wakens the loveliness of the isles in Baiac's bay: he disturbs the sleep of the waters in which lay the old palaces and towers—freshly, brightly disturbs them. Then the theme changes as before: one picture is not enough for Shelley, nor one aspect of his theme. We are swept back again into the thought of the wind as destroyer. From the Mediterranean we are borne into the Atlantic, and again the original image recurs. The sea itself is like the forest. It cleans itself into chasms before the fierce stream of the wind. The woods of ocean, the sea-blooms, and the sapless foliage grow grey with fear, and tremble and despoil themselves". *Stopford Brooke*.

## 4.

43. If I were—the sentence is completed by 'I would ne'er have striven,' etc. (l. 51). The relative is omitted in this line. Thou mightest bear—the wind could carry him on its wings.

45. A wave to pant . . . power—if he had been

a wave of the sea heaving and surging by the force of the wind.

46-47. **Share the impulse . . . strength**—be affected by the force of the wind: imbibe the spirit of freedom and strength from the wind. **Only less free uncontrollable**—Shelley's ideal of freedom is the west wind, and he himself being a believer in perfect freedom desires that he may be freer than all other creatures, though he could not approach the west wind in its wild liberty. Impatient of all restraints Shelley desires absolute freedom and he would be satisfied, if he was inferior only to the uncontrollable west wind. Freedom was a passion with him, and the untameable and impetuous west wind seems to him the only natural phenomenon which approaches his idea of liberty.

48. **I were as in my boyhood**—if he could be as free and untameable as he was in his boyhood.

49. **The comrade of . . . heaven**—in his boyhood Shelley was fond of wandering over meadows hills and dales, as well as of boating and sea-bathing. That is, 'run with the wind and race the clouds'.

50-51. **As then—in boyhood. When to outstrip . . . a vision**—in boyhood it did not seem impossible to outrun the wind. **Skyey speed**—the speed of the wind through the sky; swift aerial motion. **Scarce seemed a vision**—under the impulse of freedom and strength it hardly seemed impracticable or impossible. Compare—

"Life went a-maying  
With nature, Hope, and Poosy,  
When I was young !

When I was young?—Ah, woeful when!  
 Ah! for the change 'twixt Now and Then!  
 (Coleridge: *Youth and Age*).

Also the lines in *Tintern Abbey*:

"Though changed, no doubt, from what I  
 was when first

I came among these hills; when like a roe,  
 I bounded o'er these mountains," etc.

52. I would . . . sore need—if the poet had been a dead leaf, a swift cloud or a wave and could share in the strength of the wild west wind he would not have prayed with so much of longing for strength and ardour to be breathed into him in his hour of helplessness. As thus—in the manner he is doing. **Sore need**—because he feels quite helpless and weak.

53-54. Oh! lift me . . . I bleed!—The poet's prayer to the west wind is contained in these two lines. In this final outburst and the following stanza we have the whole soul expressing itself with one supreme effort. He implores the wind in passionate terms to impart its wild strength to him as it imparts to a wave, a leaf or a cloud. His life is full of sorrows and sufferings, and he is smarting with pain and feels exhausted. He feels no confidence to battle with adverse circumstances which have crushed his spirit. Dowden thinks that the poet confesses his weakness due to the attack of critics upon his book called *The Revolt of Islam*. That is why he prays that he may share the strength and wild spirit of the west wind. Compare—

"I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire";

(*Epipsychedion*:)

55. **A heavy weight . . . bowed**—he has been humbled and his spirit is curbed by the dead load of life and all its miseries and misfortunes. Shelley certainly felt that conventions and circumstances made the realization of his dreams of liberty and happiness unrealizable in life. Compare—

“But thy strong Hours indignant work'd  
their wills,

And beat me down and marr'd and wasted  
me”. (*Tennyson Tithonus*).

also—“Full soon thy soul shall haye her earthly  
freight,

And custom lie upon thee with a weight  
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life”

*(Immortality Ode)*

56. **One too like thee**—the poet compares himself to the west wind: but it is uncontrollable and he himself is crushed and miserable. Their similarity is described in the following words. **fameless, and swift, and proud**—these are the points of comparison between the poet and the west wind. Shelley refused to submit to conventions, was impulsive and conscious of his great mission in life to preach liberty and make mankind happy by winning freedom. We are reminded of Shelley's description of himself in *Adonais*:

“A pard-like spirit beautiful and swift  
A love in desolation masked—a Power  
Girt round with weakness—it can scarce uplift  
The weight of the superincumbent hour.”

If the poet had been as light as a dried leaf, so that the west wind could carry him: if he had been

a swift cloud flying with the wind, or a wave of water agitated by the force of the wind; he could share the impelling force of the uncontrollable wind and he would almost be as free as the wind, or even if had been what he was in his boyhood when to sail with the wind and race with it did not seem an impossibility, he would not have implored the wind for a boon in the hour of sore need. But he is helpless crushed and subdued and troubled by the turmoils of life. Otherwise like the wind he too is tameless swift and proud. In the hour of trouble he has to implore the wind to impart him strength and lift him up as a wave, a leaf or a cloud.

"Like the leaves and the clouds and the waves the poet wants to feel the impulse of the storm's uncontrollable power. Like the storm, he also is uncontrollable and proud by nature but he needs the inspiration of the west wind for the experiences of life have subdued him."

"Having finished with earth sky and sea he takes up a side issue of emotion, which has reference to himself—he who is earth and sky and sea in one. Enthralled by the swiftness and strength of the wind he wishes to be lifted and borne on the river of its strength. But even then he does not forget to link this new issue to the original theme. He takes up forest and sky and ocean in his repeating way: If I were a dead leaf thou mightest hear—if I were a swift cloud to fly with thee—if I were a wave to share thy impulse of thy strength—if I were even what I was when young I seemed thy equal scarce less swift than thou—I would not be so full of prayer to thee; but I am as weak as thou art strong, O lift me—and again knitting his thought into his emotion, not letting us loose from the first

theme, he repeats in change the images: 'O lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud.' I know nothing of music, but if this is not like the way of a musician works his changes, I should be surprised." (Stopford Brooke).

## 5

57. **Make me thy lyre .. is**—the wind rushing through the forest uses it like a musical instrument for its music, and the poet prays that like the forest he too may be made the lyre of the wind. He prays to the west wind to draw out of his heart hidden music, expressed in verses, which would sound fresh notes about life and spread new ideas among mankind.

57. **What if my leaves .. its own**—it does not matter if he has lost the buoyancy of his youth and former strength, just as the forest, too, has lost its leaves. If there were leaves on trees and the poet had been as spirited as in youth, the wind could produce through the one, and inspire the other to produce, better music. Still 'autumnal tone' can be produced only if the wind chose to make him an instrument.

59-61. **The tumult of .. in sadness**—the impetuous wind passing through the leafless forest of autumn will be softened and produce a sobered music. Similarly when it will blow over the poet and inspire him to sing, the music will be melancholy and sad because as the trees have lost their leaves the poet has also lost his youthful vigour and enthusiasm. His tone may be sad and subdued, still the music inspired by the wind will be sweet enough. The poem was written when Shelley was only 27 years old, but his recurrent moods of deep dejection made his youth even appear as the autumn of life. **Tumult of might harmonies**—the loud boi-

terous music of the impetuous wind! Compare—‘Harmonious madness’ in the *Skyla'k*. Autumnal tone—solemn and melancholy music. Sweet though in sadness—melancholy and sad but not without its sweetness. Compare—“Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought” (*The Skyla'k*). And also—“So sad, so sweet, the days that are no more” Tennyson: *The Princess*. We are reminded of Wordsworth’s following lines also from the *Immortality Ode*.

“The clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober colouring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.”

**Spirit fierce**—the wind is now addressed as a fierce spirit. The poet was very fond of rising the word spirit. The skylark is a ‘blithe spirit.’

62 **Be thou my spirit**—let me imbibe thy impetuosity. He is so enthralled by the spirit and strength of the wind that he desires to imbibe these qualities. **Be thou me**—not satisfied with imbibing the spirit of the wind, the poet now passionately desires to completely identify himself with the wind. He does not want merely to share any qualities with the wind but to merge himself in the wind and become one with it. The phrase is not good grammar but it cannot be improved without violence to the spirit of the line. ‘One’ does not rhyme well with ‘own’. **Impetuous one**—the poet is too weak to carry on his work or mission in life unless the west wind imparts him its vigour or does his work of propagating ideas.

63-64. **Drive my dead ... a new birth**—what the poet himself has failed to achieve he asks the wind to do for him. His ideas have not borne any fruit and have remained unrealized so far. He asks

the wind to scatter them and bring about the moral regeneration of the world, even as it scatters dried leaves and thereby helps the advent of springtime. **Quicken**—bring to life. Original meaning of the word. “The poet compares his thoughts with the dead leaves which, by burying and fertilising the seed, help the outburst of new life in spring. So he hopes that his words will help all the new bright impulses which he believes to be latent in humanity, to blossom forth into beautiful action. For this he appeals to the autumn wind to be, to himself and to his thoughts, what it is to the forest and its leaves.” (*Ellis*). “Like all great souls, Shelley was looking for a new earth where freedom, justice and truth should be more apparent than they are in the present world; he wanted too to feel that he himself was being made use of to bring about this great end.” (*Wheeler*.)

65. **By the incantation of this verse**—by the magical effect of his poem. Fowler quotes Shelley’s remarks on *Daute*: “His very words are instinct with spirit, each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and may yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with the lightning which has found no conductor.” Shelley desires the west wind to be the ‘conductor’ of his thoughts.

66-67. **Scatter as from mankind**—the poet eagerly asks the wind to broadcast his message among mankind as he hopes that his feeble words may yet, with the help of the wind, acquire the power to influence people and bring about their regeneration. Just as ashes and sparks of fire are scattered by wind from a hearth in which the fire is smouldering, and these sparks with the help of the

wind burst into a conflagration, similarly his own 'ineffectual' words may prove potent, when inspired by the spirit of the wind, and create a new world where freedom, justice and truth prevail. **Unextinguished hearth**—the heart of the poet is full of generous impulses and ideals which have not yet been realized. It is compared to a <sup>burning</sup> earth with smouldering fire. **Ashes and sparks**—<sup>of</sup> the fiery words of the poet. Compare—

"Bright-eye Fancy, hovering o'er,  
Scatters from her pictured urn  
Thoughts that breathe and words that burn."

(Gray : *The Progress of a Poesy*)

And F. Beaumont's *Letter to Ben Jonson*:

"Words that have been  
So nimble and so full of subtile flame."

68-69. **Be through my a prophecy**—the poet in his 'lyric rapture and prophetic exaltation' desires that the wind should become his mouth piece and declare to the world, unaware of its degeneration, that the millennium is not far off, and mankind was soon to be liberated from injustice and bondage. Let humanity hear the message of new hopes and fresh efforts. The prophecy proclaiming regeneration of mankind is like the trumpet sound on the Day of Judgment to rouse the dead from their graves. **Unawakened earth**—people unconscious of their fallen state.

70. **If winter comes far behind**—it is the law of nature that winter, the gloomy part of the year when nature is dead and lifeless, is followed, as a matter of course, by the reviving freshness of spring: so the miseries and misfortunes of mankind are bound to come to an end to be succeeded by a period of liberty and joy for all. On this famous line

which nobly rounds off the poem with a prophetic inspiration Principal Shairp says; "Autumnal decay and the barrenness of winter may make the world desolate indeed, but beyond lies waiting the spring of another year. It is the ebb and flow, the endless baffling change of the great tide of humanity which Shelley thinks, as well as the death and advent of dreary or regenerative seasons." The note of optimism sounded in this line is like the piercing ray of the sun suddenly breaking forth through impenetrable gloom. Leslie Stephen says: "Everywhere as much a prophet, as a poet, Shelley is always announcing, sometimes in exquisite poetry, the advent of the millenium which always embodies the same thought, that the man is to be made perfect by the complete dissolution of all traditional tides by which the race is at present bound together." But the finest expression of this prophetic mood in Shelley is the last chorus of *Hellas*. "The world's great age begins anew." Stopford Brooke says, "the cry is prophetic of that unconquerable hope for mankind which, underlying the greater part of Shelley's poetry, has made half its influence upon the world"

The poet implores the west wind to blow through his heart, so that he may be inspired to sing as the forest is resounding. The forest in autumn is without leaves and so he too has lost the vigour and enthusiasm of youth. In blowing through the forest in autumn the majestic harmonies of the west wind acquire a touch of sadness, and similarly blowing through his heart the impetuous wind will be subdued and produce a melancholy, though sweet music. He desires that the fierce spirit of the wind may be imparted to him, nay—he may become one with the wild wind and merge his identity in it. He earnest-

ly desires that the wind, first as it casts far and wide the leaves and seeds of autumn out of which spring is to come, may scatter his magical words, still warm with awakening power, far and wide among mankind and bring about the rejuvenation of humanity. As the sparks from a smouldering fire when carried by wind blaze forth, so his fiery words may bring about the salvation of mankind. Let the wind become the mouth piece of the poet and declare to man, unconscious of his fallen state, that the millenium was soon to come and the gloomy darkness of winter was sure to be dispelled by the freshness of the coming spring.

"He himself is now the forest, his leaves are falling. They are his thoughts, multitudes of which have withered and died. Through him the wind is passing, the wind of the universe, and it drives its thoughts along. But as it passes it makes harmonies in him. He is the lyre on which the wind plays. In that way he describes how the poem arose, how all poems about nature are born. There is nothing about destruction in this verse, but there is of wakening and kindling. The impetuosity and strength of the wind—it is now a spiritual power of the universe—has entirely since the last stanza quenched in Shelley's mind the thought of the wind as a Destroyer. That part of the theme is exhausted, but the thought of the wind as Preserver, which was barely touched before, is dominant in the last ; and Shelley, now at the very height of passion and in full union with the temp-st, which is about to burst in rain and splendour, calls on the wind to be himself, to drive with it his dead thoughts—the winged seeds which are in them, as germs are in the flying leaves of the wood, thus recalling again the original image—to quicken a new life in mankind."

(*Stopford Brooke*).

# INTRODUCTION

JOHN KEATS

(1795—1821)

HIS LIFE

## Birth and Parentage—

John Keats was born prematurely on either the 29th or 31st of October, 1795, at Finsbury, London. His father Thomas Keats, was a west-country man and held the place of head ostler in a livery-stable, kept by a Mr John Jennings, whose daughter he married, and acquiring his business set up at the Swan and Hoop, Finsbury Pavement. It was here that John was born and was the eldest of five—four boys, one of whom died in infancy, and a girl younger than all. The father was a shrewd, careful man of business; the mother a lively young woman fond of enjoyment. Hereditary influences and family environments seemed unpromising, and it is difficult to account for the birth of a genius, whose parents or any other member of the family did not exhibit any taste or feeling for art. Somehow John Keats was mysteriously endowed at his birth, though it was impossible to guess that the family of an ostler would be distinguished for producing a child who was to become a great poet in the short period of life allotted to him in this world.

**At School—**

Thomas Keats desired to send his sons to Harrow, but thinking this beyond his means, he chose the school kept by the Rev. John Clarke at Enfield, near London. John remained there for six years and received regular education without showing any signs of special interest in intellectual things. But he distinguished himself as a leader among the boys and won their regard, being high-spirited, affectionate and skilled in out-door exercises. His extraordinary pugnacity, the fits of vehement passions, rapid changes of mood and extreme sensibility, combined to make him a marked figure in the school. His school fellow and friend Charles Clowden Clarke, of Shakespearian fame and son of the headmaster, said of him: "He was not merely the favourite of all, like a pet prize-fighter, for his terror courage; but his high-mindedness, his utter unconsciousness of mean motive, his placability, his generosity, wrought so general a feeling in his behalf, that I never heard a word of disapproval from any one, superior or equal, who had known him." It was easy to predict his future greatness, though not in the realm of literature.

Soon after he had begun to go to school his father died after a fall from his horse; and when he was fifteen he lost his mother too. Within twelve months of her widowhood she had married one William Rawlinson, from whom she separated soon afterwards. John was very much devoted to his mother and her death left him broken-hearted. The children were now put under the care of Mr. Abbey and Mr. Rowland Sandell. John was now immediately removed from school and was apprenticed for about five years to a surgeon at Edmonton.

Only two years before he was suddenly removed from the school there came his intellectual awakening, and his enthusiasm for study was aroused. He discovered the delights of reading and remained absorbed in study. His appetite was insatiable and the classical antiquity began to lay its spell upon him. But Greek was not taught at Enfield otherwise Keats would have become a great scholar of that language. In Latin, however, he had a good grounding. His friendship with Cowden Clarke proved to be a very fortunate incident in Keats's life. It was he who introduced him to the 'realms of gold' and prompted him to write.

#### At Edmonton —

Keats does not seem to have objected to leaving school in order to learn surgery. For fours years he remained at Edmonton as an apprentice of Dr Hammond. But his love for literature could not be stifled and he continued study enthusiastically and paid frequent visits to Enfield to borrow books from the school library and meet Cowden Clarke there. His enthusiasm for literature remained unabated and all the that time he could spare he gave to reading and translating Aeneid into English prose This work he had started at school and finished it soon after leaving it. Clarke's literary companionship proved very fruitful. On one occasion he introduced Keats to the works of Spenser. Like so many other poets who owed their first inspiration to 'the poets' poet' Keats was also charmed by *The Faerie Queene* and it greatly helped the development of his poetic powers. He was prompted to write and the first experiments in poetry began under Spenser's influence. "Though born to be a poet," writes Browne, a friend of Keats, "he was ignorant of his birth right until he had completed his eighteenth year. It was the

tracted study. Keats went to the Isle of Wight and hoped to get quiet and rest here. But want of congenial company depressed his spirits and he returned to London. In the meanwhile he was making progress with *Endymion* and finished it in April, 1818. He explained to the public his own sense of its imperfection in the preface. But the critics completely ignored its beauties and violently attacked its faults.

### Tour and Illness.

As soon as the long and excessive strain of writing *Endymion* was over, Keats turned to new poems and in a short time finished *Isabella*, or *The Pot of Basil*. And then he set on a long walking tour in the North with his friend Charles Brown. They spent a delightful time visiting the English Lakes and then Dumfries, where they saw the house of Burns and his grave. For a few days they crossed over to Ireland also. But the holiday had tragic consequences. During his walk across the Isle of Mull he contracted sore throat and this proved the earliest symptom of the fatal disease. There was consumption in the family: and the cold, wet and the fatigue of the tour developed the fatal tendency in Keats himself. His brother Tom was suffering from the same malady and until his death, in 1818, Keats scarcely left his bedside. Soon after his return to London, savage reviews of *Endymion* appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Quarterly Review* and they naturally made him miserable. It is a mistake, however, to think, as Byron says, that Keats was killed by criticism.

Tom's death and his other brother George's migration to America left Keats desolate and lonely. Poetry had brought him the reward of merciless and uncharitable criticism and his own ill-health

had begun to show alarming symptoms. He was naturally filled with gloom and in piteous wail he cried out how weary was his life and how he yearned to get rid of its fret and fever. He turned again to poetry for solace and in his days of suffering and trouble produced his finest poetry.

#### Meets Fanny Brawne —

Brown persuaded Keats to leave the house in which Tom had died and to come and live with him at Hampstead. In October 1818 he became acquainted with Miss Fanny Brawne, a neighbour's daughter with whom he soon fell violently in love. His throat was already giving him serious cause for alarm and to this was added the consuming passion for the young pretty girl Fanny Brawne. She returned his love, but she seems never to have understood his nature or needs. His failing health and poverty made an early marriage impossible. This unfortunate love brought him restlessness and torment rather than peace and comfort. He was not destined to marry her. The intensity of passion which was soon to turn into hopelessness makes the story of Keats's love one of great sadness.

During Tom's illness Keats had begun *Hyperion* and in the few months of 1819 he produced his best poetry. *The Eve of St Agnes*, *The Eve of St. Mark*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merei* and nearly all his famous odes were written at this time. When he went to Shanklin towards the end of July he planned and wrote a play *Otho the Great* in collaboration with Brawne. 'The writing of a few fine plays' was his ambition. And there is no reason to suppose that if he had lived he would not have written excellent plays with the increasing experience of life. It was at Shanklin that he began

*Lamia.* The achievements of this year are really wonderful.

Keats's thoughts at this time were deeply coloured by the conditions which clouded his life. His grief, melancholy and depression find a faithful echo in his writings. He turned with renewed ardour to poetry because it helped him to escape from his miserable condition into the world of imagination. But he soon discovered that his strength was ebbing and it could not bear the strain of poetic composition. In the February of 1820 on a chilly night he got high fever by his careless exposure, having ridden outside the coach on a bitterly cold day. Immediately on going to bed he coughed and spat blood. His medical knowledge was sufficient to diagnose his own case. With a surprising calmness of expression he told his friend Brown, "I know the colour of that blood ;—it is arterial blood : I cannot be deceived in that colour ; that drop of blood is my death warrant ;—I must die." He lived for one more year, but he himself called it his 'posthumous life.' He was in the grip of the wasting disease.

### The Last Days—

During the first months of his illness Keats saw through the press his last volume of poetry, which received high praise, this time, from the reviewers and critics. But now he did not care for poetic fame. He was approaching his sure end. As the spring months came round there was a temporary return of hope, but soon afterwards it became clear that he could not survive another winter in England. Miss Brawne and her mother did all that they could do for the poet till he left England for Italy in September, accompanied by one of his most devoted friends, Joseph Severn, a

young artist. Shelley invited him to stay at Pisa, but Keats refused. Perhaps he did not like to be a burden to Shelley or stay with him as an invalid guest. Shelley liked him but Keats never became familiar with him. At Rome Keats's condition rapidly became worse, though Severn nursed him with desperate devotion. Separation from Fanny Brawne and his penniless condition constantly preyed upon his mind and the change of climate did no good to him. On February 23rd, 1821, came the end for which Keats had begun to long. He expired in the arms of Severn. He was buried in the beautiful little Protestant cemetery, and on the tombstone were inscribed the words he himself had told his friend to place there :—'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' Thus ended a life which was a miracle of twenty-five years.

Shelley and Byron expressed the great indignation felt at the time by those who attributed his death or its rapid approach to the savage treatment of the young poet by heartless critics. Shelley's *Adonais* is one of the greatest elegies in which a poet has mourned the untimely loss of a fellow craftsman.

#### **Keats as Man—**

In person Keats was under the middle height, well-knit, with a small head gracefully carried, thick hair of golden brown, a noble forehead and a sensuous mouth. His face was rather long than otherwise, and his large brown eyes seemed 'as if they had been looking on some glorious sight.'

As a boy Keats was passionate, chivalrous, and brave. The same traits follow him into ripening manhood. Popular estimation that he was weak, almost effeminate and a morbid hysterical youth, is wrong. As a matter of fact he was a bright

enthusiastic youth, shy and reserved, but full of vivacious humour in the company of friends. No man was ever more loved by his many friends, no man ever deserved their affection better. His affection for his brothers and sister, and dying mother unmistakably shows his warm nature. Continued ill-health, financial difficulties and hostile criticism of his poetic efforts would have embittered any person : but Keats could overcome his morbidity by warm friendships and pleasant impulses of affection. Perhaps he was a little too conscious of his humble birth. His delight in sensation was always controlled by truth and goodness, "Left fatherless at eight, motherless at fifteen," writes Mr. Colvin, "and subject during the forming periods of life to no discipline but that of apprenticeship in a surgery, he showed in his life, such generosity, modesty, humour, and self-knowledge, such a spirit of conduct and degree of self-control as would have done honour to one infinitely better trained and less hardly tried." In the words of a later critic, Keats, justly loved and esteemed for the nobility of his character, was "one of the bravest and wisest and most beautiful spirits this England has been privileged to engender."

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## HIS WORK.

### / His Poems—

While yet at school Keats voluntarily set himself to the laborious task of translating the whole of the *Aeneid* into English prose, and this he continued even after he had to leave school suddenly. This task showed the bias of his mind and the kind of subjects that appealed to him. Spenser's poetry awakened his genius and his first

attempt was *Imitation of Spenser*, and no wonder that he could use afterwards the Spenserian stanza with wonderful effect. His first poem is not remarkable in any way but revealed to Keats the possibility of his own powers. Chapman's translation of the 'Iliad' and the 'Odysey' inspired his first famous sonnet. The world of classic legend was opened to him and he began to discover his poetic talent. *I stood tip-toe upon a Little Hill* and other shorter poems reveal his love for nature and the pleasures of friendly intercourse which he got from the circle of congenial friends. To Leigh Hunt he was particularly grateful and he honoured him by dedicating his first volume of verses to him in a beautiful sonnet, which was written hastily and not a letter of the first draft was altered. The longest poem in the volume—that entitled *Sleep and Poetry*—contains a vigorous enunciation of Keats's poetic creed. It is imbued with the spirit of romanticism and may be called the Gospel of nature and freedom. He denounces therein the "Musty Laws" against which the poets of the Romantic period rose in open revolt, and calls the monotonous and unpliant heroic verse "a rocking-horse" *Endymion* is based on an old Greek myth and Keats gives us an allegory of the soul's quest of ideal beauty. The long poem has serious defects. The narrative is intricate, and innumerable episodes and digressions, overloaded details mar its unity of design. Lack of self-restraint and countless immaturities and other blemishes are no doubt there but passages of very great beauty of thought and workmanship are not wanting. The intrinsic charm of some passages is undeniably, though the poem may be subjected to severest criticism. The early poetry of Keats is overcharged with Spenserian imagery and Elizabethan conceits

*Endymion* should have been taken by the indiscriminate critics as an immature fulfilment of a glorious promise. *Isabella* is a rarely imaginative version of a tale from Boccaccio and is full of pathos, but not without morbid sensibility. *Lamia* fails to grip the imagination, & its serpent woman is not very convincing. *Ayn's Eve* is a piece of richly decorative verse with a glow of romance and mediæval spirit. But in all these poems it is the lack of restraint that troubles. Cloying sweetness, gilded conwebs and rainbow hues enrich poetry but they must know their place. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* — a little master piece of narrative art, is deservedly popular for its weirdness of romance sentiment. It is notable for its rare combination of passion and restraints. Keats was not satisfied with his *Hyperion* though it is a great improvement on the poetic achievements of *Endymion*. The poem is left unfinished but it clearly shows the heights of metrical achievements to which the poet could rise with a fuller life. If he had lived longer he might have added a great epic poem which could be placed along with Milton's great work. Byron expressed the common opinion about this incomplete work when he said. "It seems actually inspired by the Titans, and is as sublime as Aeschylus." It has already been mentioned that Keats desired to write some fine plays and the little that he lived to do in this line is not without its promise, unhappily never fulfilled.

### His Odes—

But it is in his Odes that Keats has given us his best. If he had left us only his Odes, his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is, for they have stood apart in literature. They are his greatest contribution to lyric poetry. It is in them that he gives us most of his innost self, and when he does so it is with the sure hand of the great

artist. The *Ode to Psyche* may show the tool-mark of the craftsman, *but there is* hardly any other poem of the same length which contains so much beauty. The *Ode to Indolence* has perhaps no high beauty to commend it, but *Grecian urn*, *Melancholy*, and *To a Nightingale* are among the mightiest achievements of English verse. "The note of sadness sounds through all," remarks a critic, "that insistent minor that rings dirge-like through all the haunting music of Nature and of Art; and the vivid joy of perceptive life, the ideal permanence of Art, the glamour of romance, the benison of Nature's varying moods, are contrasted with the mutability of life and the transience of pleasure." Writing about the Odes, Courthope says, that they 'are charged with a peculiar intensity, because in them he employs his first principle of art to illustrate his own emotional and philosophical theory of life. The idea of an unseen life in Nature, common to both Wordsworth and Keats, is arrived at by the former through a process of intellectual analysis, but it forces itself on the mind of the latter by means of images and words. The sight of the sculptures on a Grecian Urn awakens for his imagination melodies inaudible to the ear: the song of a nightingale, floating on the dark, is the symbol to him of stable beauty in the midst of perpetually changing human misery.'

### His Sonnets—

"Keats wrote some half a century of sonnets altogether, some of them among his very earliest and most trifling performances, others up to his latest period, including the last of all his compositions. Notwithstanding his marked growth in love of form, and ultimate surprising power of expression—both being qualities peculiarly germane to his

form of verse—his sonnets appear to me to be seldom masterly. A certain freakishness of disposition, and liability to be led astray by some points of details into side issues, mar the symmetry and concentration of his work. Perhaps the sonnet on *Chapman's Homer*, early though it was, remains the best which he produced ; it is at any rate pre-eminently in singleness of thought, illustrated by a definite and grand image. It has a true opening and a true climax, and a clear link of inventive association between the thing mentally signified in chief, and the modes of its concrete presentiment. In points of this kind Keats is seldom equally happy in other sonnets : sometimes not happy at all but distinctly at fault." (*Rossetti*.)

### Characteristics and Spirit of His Poetry

#### (1) His Cult of Beauty—

The most prominent characteristic in Keats as a poet is his insatiable yearning after the beautiful in nature. Adoration of the beautiful was his master-passion and he believed that 'there is a self-destructive progress in Nature towards good, and that beauty, and not force, is the law of this flux or change.' He hungers for the ideally perfect, many and varied manifestations of which are only dimly visible glimpses, which are meant to awaken and stimulate the soul in quest after Ideal Beauty. In *Endymion* he sings. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." And in the *Ode on a Grecian urn* in a few illuminating words he has put down his creed and the governing principle of life. His whole philosophy is summarised in the following two lines :—

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

"If I should die" says he "I have left no immor-

tal' work behid me—"nothing to make my friends proud of my memory; but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things." Not only he loved the principle of beauty himself, but became its prophet for others as well.

(2) **His Sensuousness**—No other poet could have evolved such a creed of beauty, because Keats began his life with a love of sensation and in a short time began to love the principle of beauty which he found in all things. His devotion to the impression of the moment in a mind ever on the watch for such impressions, was responsible for the copiousness and want of restraint which is conspicuous in his earlier work. He revels in descriptions of the beauties perceptible to the senses, such as form, colour, perfume or music. He discovers in the most usual objects either beauty or sources of delight or comfort, or sometimes even of imaginative horror. In this respect his originality is inexhaustible. His sensitiveness to colour, form and fragrance was extraordinary. Nothing seems to escape his observation and hardly any thing left him unmoved. The same domination by the outer senses is observable in almost all his works. But we must remember that Keats was indeed sensuous, and keenly alive, on its physical side, to all perceptions with which he came in contact, but he was far from being sensual. He was not a mere aesthetic voluptuary, whose feeling, stopped short at external loveliness and was unmoved by intellectual or moral beauty. He felt beauty in the sphere of word and deed and thought. He wanted to pass from a life of sensations to a nobler life, where he may find the agonies and the strife of the human heart. He best proclaims his loyalty to truth through his adhesion to the principle of beauty in all things. His intoxication with beauty was expressed in a letter written

brance." Perhaps this fine excess a little controlled would have immensely improved the quality of his poetry.

"The end of poetry for Keats was not the cult of beauty of an external sort cognisable by smell or touch or sight or hearing; his eyes are already set upon the beauty of sorrow and of joy, a beauty of the moral being and of the spirit. As the summons had come to him so he determined to follow it, for he always aimed at the highest, and he would not be false to his own words:

He ne'er is crowned  
With immortality who fears to follow  
Where airy voices lead."

### (5) His Detachment—

Consistently with his conception of poetry and its proper function Keats never allows his social or political opinions to intrude upon his art. In this respect again, he differs from his great contemporaries. Byron was the great exponent of the destructive forces of the Revolution; and Shelley always dreamt of Utopia and aimed at sowing the seeds of freedom by means of his poetry. He was the great apostle of continued faith in a bright future for humanity and sounded the note of the coming emancipation. Wordsworth, too, had his own message for mankind and he installed Nature on a high pedestal like a deity. Keats as a poet had no sympathy with Shelley's passion for reforming the world or Byron's spirit of revolt. All his contemporaries were affected according to their temperaments by the current events and had their own notions of reforming the world, and it were these notions which colour their poetry. Keats as an artist kept himself completely detached from the movements and conflicts of his time. He neither

sought his ago nor denounced, and never cared to paint his ideal world to lure people to their emancipation. He tried to escape the present into the mediaeval romance or Greek mythology. His only purpose was to restore 'Glory and loveliness' which had passed away. On account of this detachment from contemporary problems and constant pursuit of beauty, Keats approaches the ideal of a true artist in a greater degree than any of his contemporaries.

### (6) His Hellenism—

His imaginative escape from the world of reality was in the 'realms of gold.' Greek mythology and mediaeval romance exercised upon his mind a very great fascination. He had not received the scholar's training in the classical languages, yet, like Shakespeare, he could enter into the very spirit of antiquity. His 'natural affinity with the Greek mind,' as Prof. Jebb called it, was certainly a surprising thing for a London born son of a livery-stable keeper. His art is not classic only, his very temper is Greek. So far as his poetry is concerned it is indeed ultra-romantic and there is evidence of restraint which he may have acquired from the great classical writers. Sidney Colvin writes : "He indeed resembles the Greeks in his vivid sense of the joyous and multitudinous life of nature; and he loved to follow them in dreaming of the powers of nature as embodied in concrete shapes of supernatural human activity and grace. Moreover intuitions for every kind of beauty being admirably swift and true, when sought to conjure up visions of the classic past, or images from classic fable, he was able to do so often magically well. To this extent Keats may be called Greek, but no farther. The rooted artistic instincts of

that race, the instincts which taught them in all the arts alike, during the years when their genius was most itself, to select and simplify, rejecting all beauties but the vital and essential and paring away their material to the quick that the main masses might stand out unconfused, in just proportions and with outlines rigorously clear—these instincts had neither been implanted in Keats by nature, nor brought home to him by precept and example. Alike by his aims and his gifts, he was in his workmanship, essentially ‘romantic Gothic’ English.” And the wonder is that his acquaintance with the Greek writers was based upon translations and not a line in the original he could read.

### ✓ (7) His Diction and Rythm—

We have already seen that Keats was a voracious reader. Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Dryden among English poets were very well studied by him. He was quite familiar with the works of his great contemporaries also. This enriched his vocabulary to a remarkable degree. Lord Houghton speaking of his phraseology remarks “that it is as complete and unconventional as if he had mastered the whole history and frequent variations of the English tongue and elaborated a mode of utterance commensurate with his vast ideas.” He seems to possess the intuitive insight in the secret of wedgin g his thoughts to lueent and beautiful speech. No English poet has inherited so fully Shakespeare’s gift of frequent imaginative phrase; and so often his melody and word-painting remind us of his debt to the great poet-dramatist. Many of his passages and specially the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, from the pictorial point of view, are perfect ex-pressions: and in his success in producing vivid impressions he vies with the art of a great painter.

He is most sensitive to the splendour and beauty of word and phrase. Pictures that he conjures up before the mind's eye are remarkable for the aesthetic delight which they give to the reader's imagination. He often achieves the best pictorial effect by a single master-stroke of compound words.

His lines move with a surprising smoothness. Mr. Colvin observes: "Keats rarely fails in delicacy of musical and metrical ear or in variety and elasticity of sentence structure." The same author calls attention to the richness of the vowel and diphthong sequence of Keats's verse which impart to it a great charm and musical quality. Mechanical artifices and metrical restraints of the eighteenth century poets he never liked to imitate. To the heroic couplet he imparted a more elastic movement by rarely terminating the thought with the close of the metrical line. His verse has brought out not only the musical quality of the language, but also its power of producing marvellous pictorial effects.

### His Genius as a Poet—

John Keats was one of the greatest poets that any country has produced. When he wrote his latest copy of verses, he had not completed twenty-five years of life, and within this brief space of time he contrived to enrich English literature with some of the most attractive poems and marvellous snatches of lyrical song. It would be rash to say what would have been his achievement in the realm of poetry, if he had not died prematurely, and his genius had been allowed time to ripen. It is one of the most painful might-have-beens in the history of English literature. Even at twenty-five he compels comparison with the greatest of English poets.

son with Shakespeare and Milton. Matthew Arnold quotes his words "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death," and adds, 'he is, he is with Shakespeare.' His place is among "the inheritors of unfulfilled renown," as Shelley mourns. "I think it probable", says Sidney Colvin, "that by power as well as temperament and aim he was the most Shakespearian spirit that has lived since Shakespeare." Because like Shakespeare, Keats wrote from the direct prompting of imagination, without regard to the conscious analysis which is the poetical practice of writers. He himself says as to the poetical character, "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity, he is continually in for and filling, some other body." It seems to be a comment on Shakespeare's poetry and his own. If we illustrate what poetry is in its fullest and deepest expression we cannot find better specimens than the finest stanzas in the maturer works of Keats.

The manifold forms of nature, her secret glories and hidden delights, find fullest expression in his verse, and in a language which vies in gorgeousness and beauty the bright luxuriance and colour of the original. The marvellous richness and beauty of phrase are astonishing in their simple and direct effect upon our minds. He loads every with rift ore. Words and phrases willingly yield their secrets to him, and he, with his magic touch, imparts to them a power of suggestion and vitality which they did not seem to possess. Unheard melody breaks forth from them when the apostle of beauty only seems to play with them.

He needs no classical learning to understand thoroughly Greek life. Mediaeval romance and

Greek myths become instinct with life and full of beauty by the power of his imagination. He is a greater Pagan than Wordsworth. Shelley calls him a Greek, and the positive artistic results achieved by him under classical influence are truly admirable. His inventive faculty never seems to flag. The spontaneity and rapidity with which a train of ideas and images follow one another in quick succession are astonishing.

"There is something of the innermost soul of beauty in nearly every thing he wrote," said Tennyson, "and perhaps this is what strikes me most, the more one grows to appreciate the finer spirit of poetry at its true worth. No poet that ever lived had the faculty of *natural magic* more than Keats. He loved, as he himself has told us, the *principle of beauty* in *all things*, because he knew that to see things in their beauty was to see things in their truth." The search for truth was not a new thing to the world, nor a Keats was needed to proclaim the charm of beauty. What he gave to the world was the equation that truth was beauty and beauty truth. To quote Matthew Arnold once more: "Such work as his work is, at its best, Shakespearian, because its expression has that rounded perfection and felicity of loveliness of which Shakespeare is the greatest master."

There are defects, and glaring defects are they, in his works. But they are all due to immaturity of thought and style. Excellences by their excess turn to defects. The earlier work often shows a desire for mere prettiness of diction, an intemperate use of ornament, and a striving after verbal effect at the expense of thought. Time is necessary to ripen certain qualities of mind and soul which

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are required for great achievements in poetry. Keats died too young even to gain a large experience of life and man. His poetry is strangely deficient in humour. Yet in certain forms of poetry his triumph is complete and he is justly regarded as the founder of the school of flawless workmanship.

On his grave, by his own desire, is the inscription : "Here lies one whose name was writ in water" Saintsbury remarks, "Posterity has agreed with him that it is, but in the Water of Life." If as Keats himself says, "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," then the poetry of this apostle of beauty will remain an unfailing source of joy for ever.

### Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats—

(Wordsworth belonged to the older generation of the poets who were influenced by the French Revolution and brought about a successful reaction against the classical spirit of the eighteenth century poets. Wordsworth was one of the pioneers of the great movement which emancipated poetry from the soulless conventions of his predecessors and imparted to it a new life and vigour by widening its scope and artistic purpose. For Wordsworth, Nature was alive and imbued with a soul, and an absolute union between the spirit of nature and the spirit of man was possible, and communion between the two could be established. He made it his mission in life to preach this philosophy by means of his poetry. And it was his love of nature that led him to the love of man. Shelley, whose conception of nature was not much different from that of Wordsworth's had also a creed of his own. For him poetry was the means of preaching his ideas of freedom and justice to the world, and he proclaimed through it the advent of a new

order for mankind. He intellectualised his conception of nature and sought perfect and ideal beauty behind its external manifestations. His soul yearned to reach that ideal beauty which nature could only partially reveal. Thus we see that both the poets had their own missions in life, and poetry was the means of accomplishment. Keats did not go beyond or behind the visible beauty of nature. Nature and its varied beauties appealed only to his senses and he revelled in its colour, form and other external manifestations. It suggested to him no transcendental thoughts and carried no message for him. He worshipped beauty and did not go beyond it. He was not affected at all, at least as a poet, by the various social and political problems which troubled Shelley. He was no reformer and poetry for him, had no ulterior purpose. He was a truer artist, in this respect, than either Shelley or Wordsworth. They all adored nature and were by far the greatest exponents of the spirit of romanticism, yet their attitude towards poetic art and its purpose was widely different. Wordsworth revealed to us the healing power of nature and Shelley tried to discover immortal and intellectual beauty in it. They were both prophets as well as seers. But Keats saw nature in its own beautiful colours, without etherealising it, and felt happy in its sensuous perception. Shelley and Keats were greatly swayed by Hellenism. Shelley was directly acquainted with the great masters, while Keats had to satisfy himself with translations. Shelley is most often subjective and he transforms ordinary objects into things ethereal; Keats is more objective and things as they appear are sufficiently beautiful to satisfy his aesthetic sense. He seeks nothing mystical in them nor finds any spiritual significance in nature's phenomena.

To Keats each natural object, each change of colour in sky or sea, was lovely for its own sake and had its separate individuality. Like Shelley he did not believe in the one-ness of nature, or in any variety of pantheism. He once wrote : "The genius of poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It must be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself." Thus he insists upon spontaneity and inspiration from within as the necessary condition of producing good poetry. To catch beauty in words and thus give it permanence is the only business of a poet. If he goes beyond it or has any other view point, the less of a poet is he. "I am certain of nothing," writes he, "but of the holiness of the heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination sizes as Beauty must be Truth, whether it existed before or not :—for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love : they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty." This is how he identifies Beauty and Truth, and in this faith he lived and died.

### **His Influence—**

If the name of Keats 'was writ in water' then it is that enchanted reservoir from which the abundant stream of nineteenth century poetry flowed. Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Chapman—to them all he owes debt, for their best influences he welds together in himself. But equally, if not more, indebted are all the important poets of the nineteenth century to Keats for his deep and far-reaching influence on their poetry. Thus his position is unique. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that without Keats there would have been no Tennyson. The descriptive passages, pictorial effects, the harmony

## ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER

### Introduction—

Not long after Keats had reached London, Cowden Clarke also left Enfield, and came to settle there. The two were soon meeting and often reading together as eagerly as ever. Cowden Clarke secured a beautiful copy of the folio edition of Chapman's Translation of Homer and read it with Keats. The former writes : "Well, then, we were put in possession of the Homer of Chapman, and to work we went, turning to some of the 'famousest' passages as we had scrappily known them in Pop'e version Chapman supplied us with many an after-treat; but it was in the teeming wonderment of this his first introduction, that, when I came down to breakfast the next morning, I found upon my table a letter with no other enclosure than this famous sonnet, 'On Firt Looking into Chapman's Homer'. We had parted, as I have already said, at day-spring, yet he contrived that I should receive the poem from a distance of, may be, two miles by ten o'clock. In the published copy of this sonnet he made an alteration in the seventh line :

"Yet did I never breathe its pure serene.  
The orginal which he sent me had the phrase—

Yet could I never tell what men might mean;  
which he said was bald, and too simply wondering.

No one could more earnestly chastise his thoughts than Keats. The sonnet was written in 1815, and was published in his first volume in 1817. There were sixteen sonnets in the volume, besides the grand one on Chapman's Homer. It was written in the heat of the young poet's enthusiasm at his discovery of a new world.

### The Argument—

The poet speaks of his reading under the similitude of a journey through rich countries. In the course of this journey he has often heard of the Iliad and the Odyssey; but to him ignorant of Greek, they have been sealed books. Now, however, in Chapman's translation of Homer, he has learnt to know the great original. He compares his feelings at the discovery to those of an astronomer who has found a new star, or to those with which the Spaniards caught sight of the hitherto unknown Pacific from some height in Darien.

### Critical Appreciation—

"Keats here for the first time approves himself a poet in deed. The concluding sestet is almost unsurpassed, nor can there be finer instance of the alchemy of genius than the image of the explorer, wherein a stray reminiscence of school boy reading (with a mistake, it seems, as to the name, which should be Balboa and not Cartez, but what does it matter?) is converted into the perfection of appropriate poetry." (Colvin).

"Of the sonnets, the early one 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer', the one anticipating Death before fulfilling his poetical designs, and the final one beginning 'Bright Star', seem to be of especial excellence as examples of his pictorial genius."

(Courthope). "It was therefore a sudden immediate inspiration, a little rill of lava flowing out of a poetic volcano, solidified at once. This is not only the first excellent thing written by Keats—it is the only excellent thing contained in his first volume of verse". (Rossetti). 'One of the finest tributes ever paid by one poet to another (in this case to two other). Keats wrote it in 1815, in his twentieth year. It is the first poem in which his genius stands fully revealed. Like Shakespeare, he had "little Latin and less Greek"; or rather he had no Greek at all, though he had picked up a good deal of classical mythology in his school-days. No one contributed more than Keats to the revival of the love of the bright Hellenic spirit at the beginning of the nineteenth century: but his wonderful insight into that spirit was the gift of nature, not the fruit of learning". (Fowler).

This sonnet is no the whole finest of all the poet's sonnets and one of the finest in English. It has to be studied as illustrative of Keats's poetic art, temperament as well as his Hellenic spirit. It is rich in poetic fancy and marvellous word painting. Highly abstract ideas are made concrete by richly coloured pictures. Courthope points out that in this sonnet Keats encroaches on the province of painting. His fascination for Hellenism is also revealed here unmistakeably.

### **Metre—**

In this sonnet the rhyming scheme is a b b a, a b b a, c d, c d, c d. In the first four lines, called quatrain, the first line rhymes with the fourth and the second with the third. Similarly in the second quatrain the rhyming scheme is the same but the rhymes introduced in it differ from those introduced in the

first quatrain. The first eight lines are called the *octave* and the last six lines *sestet*, the total number of lines being invariably fourteen. In the sestet, the alternate lines rhyme. There must be unity of structure and the unity of idea in a sonnet, and it must have definite rhyme scheme to impart it the sense of unity. The *octave* makes the statement which the *sestet* develops, and the poet confines himself to a single idea.

The structure of the present sonnet deserves very high praise. The poet's mind charged with one idea pours itself in the *octave* and it moulds in the sestet the image which it has created, and ends with a sense of absolute completeness and of quiet that accompanies it. "A great sonnet does not end but dies away into silence, leaving us still listening," and this is the reader's feeling when he reads this masterpiece of Keats.

#### Analysis—

The poet is quite familiar with the works of the most renowned authors (ll. 1-4.) But owing to his ignorance of Greek he could not study Homer, whose praise, no doubt, he often heard. But Chapman's translation now gave him the opportunity of studying Homer (5-8.) He describes his feelings on reading Chapman's Homer (9-14).

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## ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told                       5  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne :  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold :  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken ;                       10  
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

J. KEATS.

## NOTES

George Chapman, who died about the age of 75 in 1634, was one of the most prolific writers and dramatists of his age. His vigorous and a very spirited translation of the *Iliad*, in rhymed couplets of fourteen syllable lines, was published in 1611, and was followed in 1614, by one of the *Odyssey*, in rhymed couplets of ten-syllable lines. His translation is preferred by many to Pope's translation, and it was popularised for young readers by Lamb in his *Adventures of Ulysses*.

1. Much have I . . . of gold—before reading Chapman's Homer Keats had read a good deal of Latin, English and other European poetry. He imagines himself to be an explorer of regions where gold may be found. Travelled in—widely read. The realms of gold—the works of first rate poets. The world of books is imagined to have been divided into kingdoms. The poet himself is the explorer and his favourite poetical works are countries rich with gold. Books of poetry are Keats's *El Dorado*.

2. And many . . . seen—he read the works of many successful poets. The world of books is imagined to have been divided into states and kingdoms. Goodly—beautiful. States and kingdoms—works of different poets; the creations of their imagination. Seen—read.

3. Round many . . . I been—'the wester islands' was a name commonly used by the ancients to devote Hesperides the Atlantis. The earthly paradise was supposed to lie westward beyond the Straits of Gibraltar and the Atlantic Ocean. And the modern seekers of gold also went westwards. But probably Keats here means by the western islands, the English and Latin poets, as distinguished from the

Greek. Keats means to say that his knowledge of poets and their works is very extensive.

4. Which bards . . . hold—the realm of literature and poetry is imagined by the poet to have been divided into states and kingdoms of which the different poets are the rulers within their own domains. But all of them have their overlord in Apollo, the Greek god of poetry and music. Apollo is compared to a feudal lord and the poets to his feudatories. Fealty—true service in bondage. The idea is taken from the feudal system in which people hold certain rights in lieu of service to be rendered to their baron or lord of manor. It is Apollo's grace which inspires their poetic powers and to him they pay their tribute of homage.

I am well acquainted with high class literature and have read differant kinds of poetry. I have read the works of European poets too and am quite familiar with their creations. In their own spheres, they are like rulers in their states and kingdoms, but they all receive their poetic inspiration from Apollo, the god of music and poetry, and render their dutiful service to him.

5-6. Off of one . . . his demesne—Keats had often heard of the grand epics of Homer. Wide-expansē—the metaphor of realm, kingdom, states is continued. Homer, being the father of poetry in Europe, and having exercised widest influence through his great epics for ages, is imagined to be ruling a great territory, in proportion to his importance and massive production. Homer is the ruler, and his kingdom is his poetry. The busts of Homer, the earliest of the Greek poets, show him to have been a man with high over-hanging brows. A projecting forehead is a sign of wisdom and intellec-

11. **Cortez**—Hernan Cortes (1485-1544), the conqueror of Mexico for Spain. He is called 'stout' for his boldness. It is a mistake of Keats. It was not Cortez who discovered the Pacific, but Vasco Balboa, the Spanish navigator. The discovery was made in 1513. **Eagle eyes**—keen vision.

12. **Stared at the Pacific**—looked intently in the direction of the Pacific and found a great ocean in the distance. **All his men**—Balboa (and not Cortex) had gone with a Spanish expedition to Central America in 157<sup>1</sup>. They had seen only the eastern coast of the continent till Balboa reached the western limit and saw an ocean stretching before his eyes.

13. **With a wild surmrise**—in their amazement of the chance discovery they tried vaguely to conjecture as to what that expanse of water was.

14. **Silent**—their surprise made them speechless or tongue-tied. **Upon a peak in Darien**—they saw the Pacific from a peak of a mountain in the Isthmus of Panama. **Darien**—the old name of the Isthmus of Panama.

9-14 Then I was filled with rapture and received a delightful shock like an astronomer who, after watching the heavens for a long time, suddenly observes a new planet, or like the Spanish explorer and his men who became speechless with amazement when he suddenly sighted the Pacific from a hill top in Darien, and they vaguely conjectured as to what it was.

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## THE TERROR OF DEATH.

### Introduction—

This sonnet occurs in a letter to J. H. Reynolds of 31 January, 1818, and was written soon after the completion of *Endymion*. It was printed in 1848 by Lord Houghton. Keats gave it no title, the present one being given by Palgrave.

### Argument—

"The Valley of the shadow of Death. The whole of Keats' life—his pure ambition, his illstarred love, his 'sense of darkness coming on', to use his own words—is in this sonnet" (Peterson). Keats being a consumptive, was always painfully conscious of his approaching death. After he had coughed out a drop of blood, he called his days 'posthumous life'. Young and conscious of his poetic powers as he was, he keenly felt that all his aspirations after Fame and Love would be suddenly put an end to by the cruel hand of the fast approaching death. In such a mood this sonnet was written and it expresses pathetically the same state of mind.

### Critical Appreciation—

According to Fowler this sonnet is "the most Shakespearean of the sonnets of the poet who has sometimes been said to have had more of Shakespeare's spirit than any other modern writer. The likeness to Shakespeare is a thing to be felt rather

than analysed, but one or two striking resemblances may be noted: (1) the beginning—compare the openings of several of Shakespeare's finest sonnets. "When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced," "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," "When in the chronicle of wasted time," "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought;" (2) the scheme of rhymes is Shakespearean, not Italian; (3) the couplet ending is especially Shakespearean; (4) the rhythm—a peculiarly stately iambic; (5) the rich imagery; (6) the richness of the language. Matthew Arnold, in applying the epithet Shakespearean to Keats' work, expressly says that he means "not imitative of Shakespeare," but having "that rounded perfection and felicity of loveliness of which Shakespeare is great master;" but in this sonnet the resemblance is closer than usual." Though several of its lines derive their rhythm directly from Shakespeare, and it follows the Elizabethan model rather closely, it is no mere copy of Shakespeare, but in vigour and originality of conception is worthy to stand beside his best.

The sonnet removes the wrong impression of those who thought that Keats was a mawkish, sentimental person. Some of his poems and letters to Fanny Brawne create such an impression. But the greatness of the thought in this sonnet clearly shows the sublimity of his feeling when very near his end. The poem has a pathetic interest which the reader cannot fail to realize.

#### **Metre—**

The rhyming scheme of the sonnet is a b a b, c d c d, e f e f, g g. This is Shakespearean model, which though borrowed from the Italian, varies in rhyme arrangement. Instead of two quatrains or an octave

followed by a sestet, we have here three quatrains (verses of four lines each), and then a couplet. The number of lines, that is 14, remains, however, unchanged. It may be noted that the whole of the poem is in one sentence.

**Analysis—**

The poet regrets that his life may be cut short before it would be possible for him to put down all his rich thoughts in poetry (11-4). The mystery and beauty of Nature too he may not be able to express (5-8). The thought that death would separate him from his beloved makes him indifferent to the attractions of the earth (9-14).

— — — —

## THE TERROR OF DEATH

When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,  
Before high-piled books, in charact'ry  
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain :  
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face, 5  
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  
And think that I may never live to trace  
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance :  
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour !  
That I shall never look upon thee more, 10  
Never have relish in the fairy power  
Of unreflecting love — then on the shore  
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

J. KEATS.

## NOTES.

1. When I have fears—when the terrible idea oppresses me. I may cease to be—I may die. The ideas of death was to more poignant in case of Keats as he was young and could not get away from the idea of his being a consumptive.

2. Before my pen . brain—before I have given poetic expression to all the precious thoughts and ideas of which my brain is full. ‘The brain’ is here compared to a field, mature thoughts to ripe corn, the pen to the gleaner, and the book in which they are to be recorded are the rich garners mentioned in the fourth line.’ It is a beautiful picture that the poet has drawn so vividly in one single line. Teeming brain—brain swarming with thoughts : ideas and images ready for poetic expression. A large number of books would be required to write them out.

3. High piled books—large number of books which the poet intended to write. Their substance is in his mind but it has not yet been poetically expressed. Charactery—written symbols of thought; writing : letters or characters. The word has been used by Shakespeare in the same sense :

“Fairies use flowers for their charactery”.

(*Merry Wives of Windsor* : Act V : Sc. V.)

“All the charactery of my sad brows.”

*Jul. Caes.* II, i, 308.

4. Hold like rich garners—the metaphor of a harvest is continued. Like the ripe corn preserved in granaries or storehouses. Full ripened grain—mature and fully developed thoughts of the poet. Much of what the poet has left us bears the mark

of immaturity and he, essentially remains a poet of youthfulness.

5. **The night's starr'd face**—the sky studded with stars at night; the starry surface of the sky.

6. **Huge cloudy . . . romance**—the night sky spangled with stars is regarded here as a canvas upon which the clouds form a beautiful picture of high romance. The clouds are to the sky what writing is to the paper. The poet sees in the sky symbols written in characters of clouds, and these clouds tell the tale of the romance of the sky. Keats desires to draw the same picture, which he sees in the sky, by means of words in his poetry. **Cloudy symbols**—mystic or vague figures **High romance**—“the mystery of the universe, of endless space and endless time”. “Two things”, say Kant, “fill me with awe, the grandeur of the starry heavens without, and the grandeur of the moral laws within”. Keats writes in a letter to Haydon; “I know no one but you who can be fully aware of the turmoil and anxieties, the sacrifice of all that is called comfort, the readiness to measure time by what is done, and to die in six hours, could plans be brought to conclusions; the looking on the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, and its contents, as materials to form greater things—but here I am talking like a madman,—greater things than our Creator himself made”.

7. **I may never . . . trace**—may die before those vague ideas, suggested by the sky and clouds, are given expression to in words, or reproduced in poetry. **To trace**—to delineate though imperfectly the beauty of the clouds and the stars and all the romantic ideas associated with them.

8. **Their shadows**—the beauty and romance of

## The Poems of 1832—

The poems which he had been writing for about two years were now published and, though the poet's name did not appear on the book, the authorship was not a secret. Tennyson's career as a poet may be said to have begun with these poems, and the final bent of his genius determined for future. His genius was now shaping a peculiar course for itself and the poems bore the stamp of his personality and were distinctly original in some cases. The control which Tennyson exercised upon the luxuriance of his imagination was particularly noticed by Mr. Aubrey de Vere. Leigh Hunt also welcomed the volume of poems in *The Tatler* but Wilson in *Blackwood* and Lockhart in the *Quarterly* made the publication an object of attack.

Tennyson was very sensitive to adverse criticism and he was naturally pained by it. But like a wise man he took the fullest advantage of the criticism and seriously began to cultivate his poetic powers, and for this he thought that a long preparation was necessary. For ten years he did not appear before the public with any poem and kept behind the scenes maturing his powers and acquiring excellence which would be free from any blemishes or traces of immaturity. The volume of 1832 contained some of Tennyson's best poems. *The Palace of Art*, *Dream of Fair Women*, *Arabian Nights*, *Lady of Shallot* and other first class poems are there. Their tone is distinctly philosophical. Their marvellously compressed word-pictures, elaborate, though artificial diction, the luxuriance of imagination and its splendours and sweet melodies—all made the little volume appear like an event in the realm of poetry. Faults of excesses there, no doubt, were but

there were authentic notes, too, which proclaimed the advent of a great poet. The real faults in his early work mentioned by Spedding, were : 'the tendency, arising from the fullness of a mind which had not yet learned to master its resources freely, to overcrowd his composition with imagery, to which may be added an over-indulgence in the luxuries of the senses, a profusion of splendours, harmonies perfumes gorgeous apparel, luscious meats and drinks, and 'creature comforts' which rather fall upon the sense, and make the glories of the outward world a little too obscure and overshadow the world within'.

Then followed a long silence of about ten years, during which Tennyson did not publish anything. It was a period of greater preparation and searching self-examination. But there was a deeper reason also for his long imposed silence. His dear friend Arthur Henry Hallam died in September 1833 at Vienna leaving Tennyson sad and forlorn. Hallam was engaged to Tennyson's sister and his intimate friends held very high opinions of his talents, and admired his intellectual eminence. But the promise of a great career was suddenly cut short by the sudden death of the young man. Tennyson raised a lofty and noble monument in his memory by writing *In Memoriam*. The foundation of this grand poem was laid at this time.

Through the marriage of Charles Tennyson to Louisa Sellwood the poet became intimate with her sister Emily. It was not till 1850 that they were married when she brought "the peace of God into his life before the alter". It was during these years when the poet was devoting himself to the cultivation of flawless language that he began that inti-

study and reflection upon King Arthur, the perfect gentleman of England. The poems already published also received his closest scrutiny and they were revised thoroughly. This habit of revision stayed with him till death.

### Poems of 1842—

Thus after a silence of about ten years came the volume of 1842. The loss of his friend deadened Tennyson's ambition for an active life, but it did not diminish his power of expression or his passion for humanity. The volume awakened the world to its possession of a new poet. The volume contained some of the most enduring poems and it won not only the imagination but the heart of England. His name was on every one's lips. His poems were discussed, criticised, interpreted and some of them were even translated in Latin or Greek. Carlyle heard the eternal melodies in the poems and like distinguished persons was loud and enthusiastic in his praises. Wordsworth paid his tribute in remarkable words, "decidedly the first of our living poets". Hitherto his work had been sadly deficient in intellectual foundation. Such foundation was now provided; for the stir of new ideas in the world at large, the inspiration of which he began to feel, the death of Hallam, which had thrown him back upon the great problems of life and destiny, his awakening of interest in philosophical and social interests, had all contributed to the enrichment of his mind and expansion of his thought. Simplicity and strength were united here with beauty and the affectations of the earlier works were almost entirely absent from this volume, a product of mature art.

### Other works—

In 1847 appeared the *Princess*. The education

of women and their right place in society was one of the great questions of the day. He deals with the problem in a half-fantastic and half-serious manner in this long poem. Tennyson's point of view and his opinions may not find much favour today but the poem is not without his characteristic excellences. Its blank verse is of great beauty and its pictorial power is remarkable. The poem contains some of the most exquisite lyrics that he ever wrote.

The year 1850 is remarkable in Tennyson's life as it saw the publication of *In Memoriam*, his marriage with Emily Sellwood, and his appointment as Poet Laureate in succession to Wordsworth. *In Memoriam* is the gift of a soul sorely troubled by all the problems of this life and of the life to come. The shock of Arthur Hallam's death had plunged the poet into a stormy ocean of doubt and bewilderment. Through the tangled problems the poet's mind gains consolation and drives away blank despair, and at the same time arms readers, suffering from similar doubts, difficulties and bereavements, with the means to combat disturbing thoughts, unhappy forebodings and gain that consolation which comes from the scriptures alone. According to Palgrave "*In Memoriam* is an elegiac treasury in which the poet has stored the grief and meditation of many years after his friend's death". It is a book of consolation, helpful able to those who had 'loved and lost', and those whose foundations of belief were reeling beneath the weight of modern thought. Scepticism, doubt, and blank despair of an intellectually awakened mind give way to a state of resignation, and even of hope. And finally the conviction grows upon the mind that "Some how good will be the final

goal of ill." The long poem which was the result of many year's labour is not only a remarkable production for the beautiful series of lyrics it contains, but also because it gives us a balanced judgment and presents a comprehensive view of the deepest needs and perplexities of humanity. The problems are of universal interest and the poet's spiritual struggles are a common experience of thoughtful people. As a spiritual biography with the poet's crowning faith in God and immortality the poem stands unique, and as an elegy it ranks with the greatest in English literature.

### From 1850 to Death—

Tennyson was keenly interested in political problems also, and some of the poems celebrate contemporary events. When he was appointed the Poet Laureate, Queen Victoria wrote to him and she remained a great admirer of Tennyson's works, specially *In Memoriam*. The Cremian War fired his patriotism and he gave expression to the popular frenzy in a lyrical monodrama of love and sadness. Though in places *Maud* abows genuine dramatic power and contains passages of genuine beauty but on the whole it is far from perfect and is marred by the praise of war. *The Charge of the Light Brigade* is one of the most popular poems and is supposed to be the best of his official productions. *The Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* is now, in general estimation, incomparably the finest thing of its kind.

For many years Tennyson had been brooding over the legend-cycle of King Arthur and the Round Table, and in the volume of 1842 a few lyrics and the fine epic fragment *Morte d' Arthur* had already appeared. From 1859 till 1885 Tennyson occu-

pied himself with the *Idylls of the King* and brought the series to a close. These twelve poems are the largest and most ambitious work of the poet though they lack the essential unity of design and cannot be called a great epic. As an independent idyll each is a picture of human interest and not too remote from the life as we know it. Tennyson's aim was not to recreate the old times, his aim was to present the undying ideal and a parable of human life and civilization. Though vaguely, the poet himself described the purpose saying : "The whole is the dream of a man coming into practical life, and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery, and death is a mystery ; and in the midst lies the table-land of life, and its struggle and performance." For Tennyson the deadliest enemy of the soul of man is sensuality and the morbid perversion of religion is another cause of man's fall. The old-world legends are made the vehicles of moral meaning to the new-world.

Of the other notable poems published in a volume in 1864, *Enoch Arden* the ever popular, was one. But meanwhile Tennyson broke new ground by writing dramas—*Queen Mary* (1875), *Harold* (1876), and *Becket* (1884)—which deal with crises in the history of the English people and show the fervent patriotism of the poet. His ignorance of the stagecraft is responsible for their failure and now we do not think of Tennyson as a dramatist at all. Two other plays that he wrote were not more successful. But so far as poetry was concerned his genius continued almost unimpaired to the end. *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, *the Ancient Sage* and *Akbar's Dream* are some of the great achievements and are remarkable for the richness of thought and the beauty of their style. They are the con-

tributions of the highest value to the religious poetry of the century.

Tennyson at one time plunged in business and suffered a heavy loss. Carlyle was instrumental in securing a pension of £200 a year for the poet by influencing Sir Robert Peele. And when he was residing at Twickenham his income from books was found to be yielding £500 a year. The poet removed to Farringford, at Freshwater, in the Isle of Wight, and this place remained his home to the last. Many notable persons visited him at Farringford and Tennyson lived a happy life receiving the homage of a nation like which seldom has been offered for so long a time to any living poet. In 1884 he was raised to peerage and was gazetted Baron of Aldworth and Farringford.

He died at Aldworth as the moonlight was flooding into his room, in early morning of October 6th, 1892. He 'crossed the bar' peacefully as he had desired, and we may well imagine that he met his Pilot face to face and completed a beautiful life with a beautiful vision. He was buried in the Westminster Abbey, beside Browning, at the foot of Chaucer's monument, with a volume of Shakespeare—the last he had read from—in his coffin.

#### Tennyson the Man—

Tennyson was "six feet high, broad-chested, strong-limbed his face Shakespearian, with deep eyelids, his ample forehead, crowned with dark wavy hair, his head finely poised, his hand the admiration of sculptors, long fingers with square tips, soft as a child's, but of great size and strength." His very appearance showed at first sight that he must be a poet.

Tennyson's character was built on the foundations of order, nobility, and simplicity. He never took an active part in public life or keen controversies of his time. But he was keenly watchful of the current events and the changing ideals of the people, and believed that under all warring interests and opinions there was law of ordered progress which was leading things to completion. There is a loftiness of character which clearly emerges from 'all his writings. A certain Puritan simplicity in life as well as writings is another unmistakable trait which no casual reader even can fail to discover. Descended from a rural stock he loved a simple healthy rural life. He had no doubt a strain of morbid temperament Carlyle once wrote that Tennyson was "a man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom, carrying a bit of chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into cosmos." Though a lover of freedom he believed in ordered progress and led a deeply religious life.

"Among men he was a king of men, among poets a prince of poets. As Turner is most admired by painters, so will Tennyson be placed highest by those to whom the veritable spirit of poetry has revealed itself. A royally-minded man, in his work and in his character, he commands devotion as by right of birth. We need not now hesitate to say that he was, in an epoch of remarkable men, the foremost man of letters of his age and country, and one of the greatest poets of all time."

(Aaron Watson).

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## TENNYSON AS THE POET

### Some General Characteristics of his Poetry—

The most striking characteristic of Tennyson's poetry is that it reflects the complex tendencies of his age and his surroundings. He was always in touch with the national feeling, and in most cases he could foresee the changes that were coming and was prepared, when they came, to guide, control or stimulate public opinion. His hand was always on the nation's pulse and with unerring judgment he knew what was coming, and what forces were working to bring about changes with their irresistible force. He was more a mouth-piece of young hopes and aspirations than a prophet who saw visions of a glorious future, determined to realise them by the force of his personality. Religious doubts, social problems, the revolt of the cultured mind against a corrupt society, pride in a far-flung Empire, the spirit of compromise so characteristic of the Victorian period—all are faithfully reflected in his works. Tennyson's poems would be a safe guide to future generations to know what the Victorian England thought and what its aspirations were. The poet did not remain uninfluenced by the advancement of science, and it may be asserted that no poet was so anxious to give expression to the scientific spirit as Tennyson.

His popularity was immense. He was a national poet above all others and kept his hold upon the public for sixty years. That he was a true representative was the cause of his unique popularity among his contemporaries, and it is to this fact that we owe the gradually weakening influence of his poetry at the present time. In some respects he may have been ahead of his contemporaries, but on the whole he wrote what the people thought.

If there had been more of universal element in Tennyson's poems his popularity would have lasted longer. But as an artist his place among poets will always remain very high. In his earlier works he was a pictorial poet, a worshipper like Keats of visible beauty. He was a careful observer and in the beginning he loaded his verse with an excess of ornament and prettiness. But this defect gradually wore away. In his fidelity to detail he may be compared to the Pre-Raphaelite schools of painters, because he could also paint an ideal atmosphere to reflect the moods of his stories or narrations.

By nature he was attracted by external objects and he could find in nature a life and spirit behind the visible. But landscape for him was full of human association, and man and nature were finely woven together by him. His observation was so accurate and fine that at times it became almost photographic and proved an unfailing source for poetic description and imagery. He can safely be placed above any other poet in his skilful and vivid painting of natural scenery. There is no detail which escapes his attention.

Tennyson's long preparation and careful study of the classical literature enriches his poetry to a remarkable degree. So often the translations of

Greek or Latin poetical expressions are improved upon in English, and the rendering becomes more graceful, apt and acquires a high poetic value. His learning is no load to poetry, it embellishes all that he writes and imparts it a distinction. In the subtle use of alliteration, and the accommodation of sound to sense Tennyson has no equal. The aptness of his similes and their picturesqueness is something which cannot be improved upon. Like a true poet he has a keen sense of the values of words and phrases and he uses them with exquisite precision and appropriateness. In word-painting he is directly influenced by the example of Keats and often achieves effect with the greatest economy of words. His sense of music is evident even from his earlier works and it seems that with his growing skill in refinement and polish all the secrets of harmonious measures and melodious diction are revealed to him. The melody of diction lingers in our memory and its music resounds in our soul.

Some of the more important characteristics are briefly described here. A concluding remark of Prof. Webb may usefully be quoted here :—"His poetry, with its clearness of conception, and noble simplicity of expression, its discernment of the beautiful and its power of revealing and shaping it with mingled strength and harmony, has become an integral part of the literature of the world, and so long as purity and loftiness of thought expressed in perfect form have power to charm, will remain a possession for ever".

### **His attitude towards Nature—**

From his boyhood Tennyson was a sympathetic observer of the outward forms of nature, and he made splendid use of what his eyes had taught him

in his earlier poems. Later his interest in insects and birds and flowers outran the legitimate opportunity he possessed of using it in poetry. His son tells us that it was Tennyson's habit to keep note-books of things he had observed in his garden or in his walks and to work them up afterwards into similes and use them in his poems. Wordsworth would store his observations in memory and use them by vividly recalling them and giving them poetic expression as occasion demanded. But Tennyson would note down observations, turn them into similes and then fit them in his poems. The result is that these similes which are pleasing enough when studied in Tennyson's note-books often have the air of impertinences, and in spite of their beauty, appear alien to their setting. The comparison often seems to be a thought too great for the thing it is meant to illustrate. Then, there are discoveries of natural science which Tennyson embodied in his poems. Now these discoveries have lost their glamour and appear quite commonplace. In the days of Tennyson they were new and created feeling of wonder, and references to them in his poetry afforded delight to the reader.

Scientific research had altered for Tennyson the conception of nature. Wordsworth's view of nature could not possibly appeal to him, and he never cared to see a living spirit or life in nature beneath what was visible to the eye. Nature 'red in tooth and claw' could never be all in all to Tennyson. The series of pleasant pictures which natural phenomena offered was also not satisfying to him as in case of Keats. Tennyson went a step forward. He linked nature with man, and saturated the landscape with human associations, and human feelings. The phenomenon itself is not informed by any indwell-

creed. He is reported to have said to a friend on one occasion : "There's something that watches over us, and our individuality endures : that's my faith, and that's all my faith." He explains the great designs of God in the well-known lines :

That God, which ever lives and loves  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.

Thus we find that his concession to science, his belief in intuitional revelation of truth and the ultimate triumph of faith, all combine in his creed, and he represents the main currents of thought by reconciling them all and giving a poetic expression of the highest value in the great poem *In Memoriam*. Queen Victoria liked the poem so much that she placed it next to the Bible for its religious spirit and for its power to soothe a bruised heart.

#### **Attitude towards Social and Political Problems—**

In his ethical thought Tennyson is clearer because he has to make no efforts in reconciling conflicting opinions. Law and order are for him rules of conduct. His ideal of life is quiet, dignified and orderly existence. Lawlessness and licence are intolerable to him as they are the antithesis of rational existence. For him they are not the necessary conditions of bringing about a change in society disturbance would not allow the established order to be disturbed by any violent measures in the name of progress and renovation of society. He abhorred the anarchic tendency which is impatient of ordered progress. When he was quite a youth, and still under the influence of the great romantic poets, he had a tinge of revolutionary enthusiasm

his political sympathies were naturally inclined his way. We know that he went to Spain to help rebelling people against their king. But, like Wordsworth, he did not take much time to change his political views and advocated methods of advance which were directly opposed to the revolutionary spirit of his youth. He is typically English in condemning measures which bring about sudden and violent changes. Orderly development is his ideal and he has no sympathy with Shelley's passion for radical democracy that sought to obliterate all class distinctions. He desires his country to be a land of settled Government in which freedom is slowly broadening down from precedence to precedence. Carlyle exercised a very great influence upon Tennyson and they both believed in the Great Man Theory. Himself a great lover of his country Tennyson has left behind some of the finest poems charged with patriotic feeling. Though he was never actively associated with any movements he wisely foresaw some of the great political problems which the English had to face later on. It was his dream to see people drawn together by the bond of common humanity and kindlier sympathy. But his compromising spirit, excellent to lay down rules of conduct, does not thrill the imagination. Life after all is a great adventure where intrepid idealists have also a place, and often their ardour and enthusiasm renovate society as nothing else can. Tennyson was certainly in advance of his age. In "The Princess" we find a healthy progressive note and it presents in a just and balanced form the problem connected with woman's place in society. It may seem reactionary to the modern mind, but considering the times when the poem was written we have to admit that it is animated by

progressive spirit and states the case clearly and reasonably.

### Tennyson's Lyrics—

✓ Tennyson's lyrical gift spans sixty years of his production. It is not equally active all the time, but 'comes and goes like a frequent rainbow'. We discover the lyrical element in verses not professedly lyrical in themselves. His lyrics share in the general characters of his poetry—its close texture, its consciousness, its studious management of sound and its usual though by no means universal, leisureliness of progress. Most of his lyrics are triumphs of execution, and what Tennyson does in them is to make English more like Italian. He is justly famed for the riches and cunning of his vowel-sequences, in which he seeks variety as well as resonance, avoiding generally harsh sounds. This kind of skill is best seen and is most wanted in lyric, where sound and substance have to be most clearly blended, because it is here that the substance is least able to excuse or carry off any failure in sound.

Keats has stood directly in the relation of a master to Tennyson. At least he is Tennyson's early intimate teacher. For his coloured sensuous descriptive verse and 'lyric picture' in which Tennyson learned to excel, the poetry of Keats was undoubtedly his example.

✓ Tennyson's predecessors were more passionately inspired, but he shows greater cunning as an artist. His early poems show him fancy-laden in which he is crude but picturesque. They are juvenile and often imitative and the poet himself realized their defects. In the volume of 1830 there was a distinct improvement, and we find therein wonderfully

designed poetic tapestry. The poems are not burdened by any message, but at the same time they are not the vehicle of such intense personal feeling as found in Shelley's poems. The volume published two years later distinctly shows a further advance. The boyish excess of fancy and a glittering turn of phrase are not so predominant. The new poems showed that the poet had lost nothing of lyric exuberance and had resources of style and of thought not hitherto credited to him. The hard discipline of art is evident and fancy is changed into imagination. There is surer touch in his measures as in his ideas.

When Tennyson expresses his personal feelings his tone becomes a little hysterical. In the expression of some single, intense mood dramatically, he is happiest and shows his superb skill. Tennyson realizes that he achieves marvellous results when he concerns himself mainly with a single mood and its adequate rendering in word and image and rhythm. The successive revisions which Tennyson's poems underwent show with what care he laboured to achieve his aim,—the rendering of a mood by the selection and the ordering of the picturesque details, by the choice of emotionally significant detail, and the subtle varying of cadences.

### CRITICAL REMARKS

If we descend from these spheres of lofty speculation, and turn to the positive and practical aspects of Tennyson's poetry, we may allow that it undoubtedly represents the ideas and tastes, the inheri-

ted predilections, the prevailing currents of thought, of Englishmen belonging to his class and his generation. Moderation in polities, refined culture, religious liberalism chequered by doubt, a lively interest in the advance of scientific discovery coupled with alarm lest it might lead us astray, attachment to ancient institutions, larger views of the duty of the State towards its people, and increasing sympathy with poverty and distress—all these feelings and tendencies find their expression in Tennyson's poems, and will be recognised as the salient features of the national character. In the direction of political ideals his imaginative faculty enabled him sometimes not only to discern the movement, but also to lead the way. The imperial conception—realising the British empire's unity in multiplicity, regarding it as a deep-rooted tree which sustains and nourishes its flourishing branches, while the branches in return give support and vitality to the stem—was proclaimed in his verse before it had attained its present conspicuous popularity. He saw that the edifice had been quietly set up by builders who made no noise over their work; and he called upon all English speaking folk to join hands and consolidate it. The revival and spread of profound veneration for the Throne, as the common centre and head of a scattered dominion, is another outcome of the same idea that owes its development to the last thirty years of Queen Victoria's reign: and some share in promoting it may fairly be attributed to the Laureate's stately verse. In all these respects, therefore, it will be right for the future historian to treat Tennyson as a representative of the Victorian period, and to draw inferences from his work as to the general intellectual and political tendencies of the nineteenth century.

2

The gifts by which Tennyson has won, and will keep, his place among the great poets of England are pre-eminently those of an artist. His genius for vivid and musical expression was joined to severe self-restraint, and to a patience which allowed nothing to go forth from him until it had been refined to the utmost perfection that he was capable of giving to it. And his 'law of pure and flawless workman-ship' (as Matthew Arnold defines the artistic quality in poetry) embraced far more than language: the same instinct controlled his composition in the larger sense; it is seen in the symmetry of each work as a whole, in the due subordination of detail, in the distribution of light and shade, in the happy and discreet use of ornament. His versatility is not less remarkable: no English poet has left masterpieces in so many different kinds of verse. On another side the spiritual subtlety of the artist is seen in the power of finding words for dim and fugitive traits of consciousness; as the artist's vision, at once minute and imaginative, is seen in his pictures of nature. By this varied and consummate excellence Tennyson ranks with the great artists of all time.

R. C. Jebb.

3

He had added to English poetry a body of work which, though not the greatest contributed by any man, though falling short of Chaucer and Coleridge in fresh and original gift, of Spenser in uniform excellence and grasp of a huge subject, of Shakespeare in universality, in height and depth and every other creature, of Milton in grandeur and lonely sublimity, of Wordsworth in ethical weight and grip of

diction, the liberation and enrichment of English verse, and he uses them all as a conscious, careful artist. His poetry stands to theirs much as a garden to a natural landscape. The free air of passionate inspiration does not blow through it so potently, it lacks the sublimity of sea and moor and the open heavens. But there are compensations. The beauty of nature is enhanced by art, the massing of blooms, the varying of effects, the background of velvet lawn and grassy bank and ordered hedge-row, above all, by the enrichment of the soil which adds a deeper crimson to the rose, and blends with simpler blooms the splendours of the exotic. An imagination rich in colour, a delicate and highly trained ear, a thought which if not profound was nourished on the literature and philosophy of Greece and Rome—these were among Tennyson's gifts to English poetry, and they go a long way to counterbalance such limitations as are to be found in his thought and feeling. The peerage conferred on him in 1884: was the recognition of the greatness of his reputation and the intensely national spirit of his work.

*H. J. C. Gierson.*

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## IMPORTANT DATES IN TENNYSON'S LIFE.

1809 Tennyson born at Somersby.  
 1827 *Poems by Two Brothers* (Alfred and Charles).  
 1828 Matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge.  
 1829 Won the Chancellor's medal for *Timbuctoo*.  
 1830 Visit to Spain with Hallam. *Poems chiefly Lyrical.*  
 1831 Left Cambridge. Death of his father.  
 1832 Tour up the Rhine with Hallam. *Poems.*  
 1833 Death of Hallam at Vienna.  
 1836-40 Tours in the British Isles.  
 1842 *Poems* (2 volumes).  
 1844 Loss in business.  
 1845 Grant of £ 200 a year as pension.  
 1847 *The Princess.*  
 1850 Married Emily Sellwood. *In Memoriam* published. Appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Wordsworth.  
 1853 Makes home at Farringford in the Isle of Wight.  
 1855 *Maud, and other Poems.*  
 1859 *Idylls of the King* (four only).  
 1864 *Enoch Arden.*  
 1868 Builds a house at Alderworth Sussex.  
 1869 *The Holy Grail and Other Poems.*  
 1875 *Queen Mary : a Drama.*  
 1876 *Harold.*  
 1883 Cruise with Goldsmith to Copenhagen.  
 1884 Tennyson receives a peerage. *Becket.*  
 1886 Death of his younger son Lionel. *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After.*  
 1889 *Demeter and Other Poems.*  
 1892 Death of Tennyson at Aldworth (October 6). Burial in Westminister Abbey.

# COME INTO THE GARDEN, MAUD

## Introduction—

These exquisite lines are a part of a long poem, *Maud*, which was finished and published in 1855. Its origin is peculiar. Eighteen years before, at the solicitation of Milnes, Tennyson contributed a short lyric to a publication which was intended for the benefit of an author in distress. This was copied in *Annual Register*, the sub-editor being in consequence rebuked by his chief "for having inserted among his selections from thh year's poetry a bit of trivial verse." Nobody regards the little lyric as trivial now, for it is that which begins :—

" O that 'twere possible  
After long grief and pain  
To find the arms of my true love  
Round me once again."

Sir John Simeon remarked to the poet that it seemed to him as if something were wanting to explain the lines, and out of that suggestion *Maud* came into being. He wrote one poem to make the original intelligible, and then felt it necessary to write another to explain the second. Thus a series of poems was written, as it were, backwards. The result was *Maud*.

## The story of Maud—

The story opens with the familiar incident of financial disorder. The hero of *Maud* has lost his father some years before by a sudden and violent

death, following immediately upon financial ruin, which is understood to have enriched Maud's father. The son suspects foul play and soon after by the death of his mother is left an orphan and quite alone in the world.. Constitutionally prone to depression and melancholy he lives a retired life and becomes more and more morbid and irritable. Meanness and selfishness is all that he sees in human nature and in sheer disgust lives apart from mankind. Maud's father, who is suspected of the murder of the hero's father lives far away from the property acquired by his foul deed. But he returns with his daughter who is now a grown up beautiful girl. The hero meets the girl but at first finds her ' faultily faultless ' and in spite of her singular beauty cannot love her. Gradually his mind changes and Maud accepts his love, and this leads to a quarrel between the hero and Maud's brother and the latter is killed. The hero goes mad and Maud dies. After sometime he regains his sanity and decides to seek relief from sorrow on the field of battle, and to expiate his past by fighting for his country.

### Maud.—

Tennyson remarks on the poem as follows:—"The poem is a little Hamlet. It is the history of a morbid poetic soul, under the blighting influences of a recklessly speculative age. He is the heir of madness . . raised to sanity by a pure and holy love which elevates his whole nature, passing from the height of triumph to the lowest depth of misery, driven into madness by the loss of one whom he has loved, and when he has at length passed through the fiery furnace, and has recovered his reason, giving himself up to work for the good of mankind through the unselfishness born of his great passion."

When the poem was first published it was severely criticised. It was styled feverish, careless, rambling, obscure, prose run made. The poet's sentiment that was may be a cure for moral evil, roused fierce criticism. We must understand the poet's point of view before judging the poem as a whole. The hero is mawkish and unsatisfactory, but that is just what he is meant to be. Tennyson says : "I do not cry out against the age is hopelessly bad, but try to point out where it is bad in order that each individual may do his best to redeem it : as the evils I denounce are individual, only to be cured by each man looking to his own heart. I denounced evil in all its shapes, especially those considered venial by the world and society."

#### Appreciation—

"Maud embodies Tennyson's most elaborate presentation of a dramatic monologue. It has this peculiarity, noted for us by the poet himself, that different phases of passion in one person take the place of different characters. The ordinary dramatic monologue presents a character to us at some one moment of its life ; in *Maud* the hero passes through a succession of phases. It is for this reason that the poet has entitled it a monodrama rather than a monologue." *Maud* is pre-eminently the voice of youth. Its somewhat disordered passion, wedded to lyrical outbursts of sheer music ; its eager reproaching and tender idealism ; its argumentativeness and its despair reflect the moods with which we are all familiar between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. It is one of the most perfect picture of first love set to music for all time. It gives us the most faithful representation of madness since Shakespeare. Gladstone remarked that "Mr. Tennyson's power

of execution is probably nowhere greater." Professor Jowett said that he did not know any verse out of Shakespeare in which the ecstasy of love soars to such a height. Tennyson himself regarded *Maud* as his finest achievement, and it was this poem which he most commonly read or recited to his friends.

### Come into the Garden, Maud—

In this poem, which though a fragment of the longer one is complete in itself, the lover is awaiting Maud in the rose-garden. "The ball had lasted the whole night, and the music had only ceased with the flush of dawn. Now at last the lover may hope to see Maud, and he awaits in the garden communing with the flowers who feel with his feelings and fill him with their soul. The rose hears his vows and catches his passion only to thrill it back into the lover's heart. The violets have jewelled Maud's footprints in the meadows. The lilies and the roses have been awake with him all night sighing for Maud. And when at last Maud is coming the whole garden becomes his voice." The poem utters the natural speech of rapture in words that need no music to enhance their melody." Mr. Lamborn observes, "This song from *Maud* is more effective when sung than when spoken. The frequent irregularities in the rhythm give scope to the musician, but as they have usually no correspondence with the nature of the subject they have an awkward effect upon the reading—the quickening effect of the anapaest, for example, in 'and a hush' would be much more appropriate to 'and a rush.' sometimes however sense and rhythm do correspond as in line 15 where the movement of the dancers is clearly suggested. The words, too, as befits a song, are pretty rather than powerful, except the magnificent hyperbole of the last stanza which is surely out of place among these

pretty fancies." Ruskin greatly admired this lyric, quoting lines 63-66 in *Modern Painters* (III. pt iv chap. 12), as an "exquisite instance of the pathetic fallacy," that is, of a legitimate application of the figure. He uses the lines again in the peroration of *Sesame and Lilies*.

### Summary—

The lover of Maud is waiting alone at the garden gate and is inviting her there, when the night is over and the dawn is approaching and the scent of honeysuckle and rose flower fills the air.

Venus, the morning star, is beginning to grow faint in the increasing light of the dawn, as if fainting in the arms of its lover. The morning breeze has also sprung up and it is the ideal hour for lovers to meet.

The roses have heard the whole night music going on inside the hall and the jessamine creeper at the window has moved as if keeping tune with the dancers. Now the music and dance have come to an end with the coming dawn heralded by the song of birds and setting of the moon.

The lover waiting in the garden for Maud communes with the flowers. He tells the lily first that there is only one person in whose company Maud can feel happy and that person is himself. She must be feeling weary for the music and dance have continued the whole night. Guests have all gone away some to the west and others to the east, and the last carriage has departed.

Then he addresses the rose. Maud can never belong to the lord-lover whose sighs are useless. She is only his own for ever and for ever. Let the lord-

Violets spring up when the March-wind blows over the ground touched by the feet of Maud, and they mark her path from the meadow to the shady caverns where lovers have met—places which appear to the lover as beautiful and blessed as Paradise itself.

The acacia, the lake-blossom, and the pimpinal show no sympathy to the lover in the garden. But roses and lilies kept awake the whole night waiting for Maud to come, as they knew her promise of meeting the lover in the morning. The flowers kept sighing in sympathy with the lover for the whole night and impatiently waited for the morning hour.

Maud is the loveliest of girls as the rose is among flowers. She combines in herself the beauty and fragrance of both, the rose and the lily. The lover asks her to come into the garden gaily dressed and with a beaming face and cause the flowers to bloom as if she was their sun.

The flowers feel that Maud is coming before she is in sight, and they are all affected by her approach. Each flower expresses its feelings in a characteristic manner. The lover's feelings are also heightened

and he feels that he cannot live without her. She is his fate, his very life.

The lightest footfall of Maud would the lover hear and his heart would begin to beat. Nay, even if he had turned into dust and had been lying buried in his grave for years, Maud's steps would stir his dust, which touching her feet would turn into beautiful flowers.

#### Metre—

"Couplets of four and three accents, arranged in stanzas of six and eight lines. In places the movement is quickened by an internal rhyme in the longer lines. Where there might seem to be only three accents in the first line of the couplet, as in the first line of all, a slower reading gives the required number of four accents" (Fowler). The prevailing metre is trochaic and there are occasional iambuses and anapaests.

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## COME INTO THE GARDEN, MAUD

1

Come into the garden, Maud.

For the black bat, night, has flown.

Come into the garden, Maud.

I am here at the gate alone :

And the woodbine spurs are wafted abroad.

And the musk of the roses blown.

5

2

For a breeze of morning moves.

And the planet of Love is on high,  
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves

On a bed of daffodil sky.

10

To faint in the light of the sun she loves,

To faint in his light, and to die.

3

All night have the roses heard

The flute, violin, bassoon :

All night has the casement jessamine stirr'd

15

To the dancers dancing in tune :

Till a silence fell with the waking bird,

And a hush with the setting moon.

## 4

I said to the lily, 'There is but one  
 With whom she has heart to be gay. 20  
 When will the dancers leave her alone ?  
 She is weary of dance and play.'  
 Now half to the setting moon are gone,  
 And half to the rising day ;  
 Low on the sand and loud on the stone  
 The last wheel echoes away.

## 5

I said to the rose, 'The brief night goes  
 In babble and revel and wine.  
 O young lord-lover, what sighs are those,  
 For one that will never be thine ? 30  
 But mine, but mine,' so I sware to the rose,  
 'For ever and ever, mine.'

## 6

And the soul of the rose went into my blood,  
 As the music clash'd in the hall ;  
 And long by the garden lake I stood, 35  
 For I heard your rivulet fall  
 From the lake to the meadow and on to the wood,  
 Our wood, that is dearer than all ;

## 7

From the meadow your walks have left so sweet  
 That whenever a March-wind sighs 40

He sets the jewel-print of your feet  
 In violets blue as your eyes,  
 To the woody hollows in which we meet  
 And the valleys of Paradise.

## 8

The slender acacia would not shake                          45  
 One long milk-bloom on the tree :  
 The white lake-blossom fell into the lake,  
 As the pimpernel dozed on the lea :  
 But the rose was awake all night for your sake,  
 Knowing your promise to me :                                  50  
 The lilies and roses were all awake.  
 They sigh'd for the dawn and thee.

## 9

Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,  
 Come hither, the dances are done.  
 In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls.                          55  
 Queen lily and rose in one :  
 Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls,  
 To the flowers, and be their sun.

## 10

There has fallen a splendid tear  
 From the passion-flower at the gate.                          60  
 She is coming, my dove, my dear ;  
 She is coming, my life, my fate :  
 The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near ;'  
 And the white rose weeps, 'She is late ;'

'The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear :'  
And the lily whispers, 'I wait.'

## 11

She is coming, my own, my sweet :  
W<sup>e</sup>re it ever so airy a-tread,  
My heart would hear her and beat,  
W<sup>e</sup>re it earth in an earthy bed ;  
My dust would hear her and beat,  
Had I lain for a century dead ;  
Would start and tremble under her feet,  
And blossom in purple and red.

70

LORD TENNYSON.

## NOTES

### 1

1. The garden—the garden attached to the hall where dancing was going on.
2. Black bat night—classical writers represent night with black wings. In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we have, "sleep with leaden legs and batty wings doth creep."
5. Woodbine spices—the fragrance of the honeysuckle. Wafted—blown.
6. Musk—fragrance.

### 2

8. The planet of love . . . high—Venus the morning star (and the goddess of love) has risen above the horizon heralding the approaching dawn. Venus is an evening star also and is called both Hesperus and Phosphorus. "Hesper—Phosper double name for what is one." (*In Memoriam*).
9. She loves—Venus is imagined to love the sun.
10. A bed of daffodil sky—"the expression describes the saffron coloured light that succeeds the first flush of dawn." The daffodil is a flower of delicate yellow colour.
11. To faint in . . . she loves—Venus is imagined to be in love with the sun, and as the star grows dim and ultimately becomes invisible in daylight, it is imagined to have fainted and died in the arms of its lover, the sun. Die—disappear.

## 3

13. All night—the ball going on inside the hall lasted the whole night.

14. Bassoon—is a wind instrument of a very low deep tone ; it plays the bass to the treble of the flute.

15. Casement jessamine stirred—the jessamine creeper at the window, moving in the breeze is imagined by the lover as swaying in sympathy with rhythmic dance in the hall.

17-18. Waking bird and the setting moon—are both meant to indicate the approach of dawn.

## 4

19. There is but one—the lover himself. The lover communes with flowers and feels they are in sympathy with him.

20. With whom... gag—she cannot be happy in the hall though dancing and surrounded by company.

21. Leave her alone—because that is what she desires.

23. Half—half of the guests. Setting moon—the west.

24. Half to the... day—half of the guests have gone to the east. That is they have all gone some in one direction, others in another.

26. Wheel echoes away—the sound of the carriage carrying away the last guests.

## 5.

28. Babble revel and wine—the merriment going on with the ball. Babble - idle conversation.

29. Young lord-lover—the young lord who aspired for the hand of Maud and was rejected. He is the unsuccessful lover and rival.

30. One—Maud. Sware—swore.

6.

The soul of... my blood—the lover imagines the rose in sympathy with himself and communicating its thrill back to the lover's heart. The passion caught by the rose is thrilled back into the heart of the lover.

38 Our wood—because the lovers had met there.

7.

39. From the meadow etc.—The construction is : 'the walks from the meadow to the woody hollow.' The meadow which has been blessed by the touch of her feet.

39-43. From the meadow.....woody hollows—where her foot has trod the earth is sweeter and thus bursts eagerly into blossom beneath the influence of spring.

40. March-wind sighs—when spring arrives and the March-winds blow.

41. He sets the .....eyes—the wind causes the violets to blossom for decking the footprints, and the violets are as blue as the eyes of Maud. The foot prints are imagined to have been decked with flowers.

44. Valleys of paradise—the blessed spot appears to the lover as beautiful as heaven, because he has sweet Maud there.

8.

45. The slender acacia—a kind of shrub bearing yellowish or whitish flowers. Would not shake—remained motionless, undisturbed by the passion of the lover.

46. Milk bloom—a whitish flower.

47. **White lake-blossom**—the water lily. Fell into the lake—drooped in slumber.

48. **Pimpernel . . . lea**—pimpernel also showed no sympathy with the lover. It dozed with folded petals. The pimpernal is a small field flower usually of a scarlet colour. **Lea**—meadow.

49. **For your sake**—like the lover, the flower was also waiting for Maud.

50. **Your promise**—to come and meet the lover.

52. **They sighed . . . thes**—these flowers being in true sympathy with the lover behave like him and impatiently wait for the dawn when Mand would come.

#### 9.

53. **Queen rose . . . girls**—Maud is the loveliest of the lovely girls, like the most beautiful rose among the buds.

55. **In gloss of . . . pearls**—richly dressed, coming directly from the ball.

56. **Queen lily . . . in one**—she combines in herself the purity of lily and the beauty and fragrance of the rose. She is tall and stately like the lily and has its purity : and she is like the rose because, ‘roses are her cheeks, and a rose in her mouth.’ Compare the lines in *The Ancient Sage* :

‘My rose of love for ever gone,  
My lily of truth and trust—  
They made her lily and rose in one,  
And changed her into dust.’

57. **Sunning . . . curls**—Maud’s golden curls make her face bright as the sun.

58. **Be their sun**—the flowers would blossom when they will see her face, as they do when the sun shines upon them.

## 10.

59. This stanza describes the feelings of flowers with which they welcome Maud. **Splendid tear**—a glittering dew drop.

60. **Passion flower**—a genus of climbing plant having red flowers.

61. **My dove**—my darling ; the word is used as a term of endearment.

62. **My life . . . fate**—dear as life itself and on whom depends his fate or destiny.

63. **The red rose cries**—the approach of Maud is at once felt by the flowers. "Notice how characteristically each flower expresses itself. The glorious red rose, so magnificently beautiful, cries aloud in ecstasy. The fragile delicate white rose can only sob a pitiful lament. The little larkspur that grows so stiff and straight is all attention. The lily whispers in the depths of its heart."

65. **Larkspur**—it is a small blue or purple flower which grows along the sides of a long straight stalk. The poet describes it as if attentive to listen to the footfalls of Maud.

## 11.

68. **Were it ever . . . tread**—however light her steps may be the lover would at once have a feeling that she is coming. **Airy**—light.

69. **My heart . . . beat**—the lover somehow does perceive her approach, if not by hearing, by his heart which begins to beat with expectation and joy.

70. **Were it earth**—even if the heart had been turned into dust. **In an earthly bed**—lying in a grave.

71. My dust.....beat—even his dust would be animated by the approach of her step and, though inanimate, it would begin to throb..

73-74. Would start.....red—his dust, though lying for a hundred years in the grave, would quiver to the touch of Maud's feet and to her footfall, and burst forth into blossom, like the meadow which decks her footprints with violet flowers.

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INTRODUCTION  
ROBERT BROWNING  
HIS LIFE AND WORK

( 1812-1845 )

**Early Education—**

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, on the south side of London, on May 7, 1812. His father was a clerk in the Bank of England and was a scholar, book-lover and a highly gifted intellectual man of character. His mother, 'a divine woman,' as he called her, was naturally musical, deeply religious and very affectionate. Browning's inherent love of music and his feeling for spiritual realities may be traced to his mother's influence upon his character.

The child was keen, precocious and highly imaginative. He was nurtured on classics, and even his pets were given classical names. Music and drawing attracted while he was only three years old and he showed a promise to become proficient in these arts. He was an admirable musician. He was sent to a small private school, and then he passed into another preparatory school where he remained until he was fourteen. After not a very happy experience of schools he studied at home and also attended lectures at University College. His father's library was always at his disposal and he read widely. Physical accomplishments such as riding, dancing, fencing and boxing were also not neglected and he became proficient in them also. But informal character of his education tended to widen the gulf between him and the average educated man.

In his study of poetry he first fell under the potent spell of Byron and then under that of Shelley, whose influence, indeed, remained with him till late in life. Destined for the medical profession, he entered Guy's Hospital, but this was not his vocation. At one time he had a passion for the stage and wanted to be an actor. When he was about the age of twenty his father, who had a just confidence in his son's genius, permitted him to choose his own career in life, and he finally decided his long-cherished idea of becoming a poet.

### Dedicated to Poetry—

Browning began to write verses very early. "I can never recollect *not* writing rhymes, but I knew they were nonsense even then," he wrote later to Elizabeth Barret. His earliest work, a small volume of verse, was written at twelve, but failing to find a publisher he threw it on the fire in disgust. The first extant work is the "Fragment of a Confession," *Pauline*, published anonymously in 1833 when he was just twenty. We have already mentioned Byron and Shelley as the poets who influenced Browning; in *Pauline*, Keats's influence is quite clear. The poem had few readers. It found, however, a just critic, and gained its author a friend, in W. J. Fox, editor of *The Monthly Repository*. J. S. Mill read it with intense appreciation, and a little later, Rossetti was charmed by it. The poem was not meant for the general reader and its cold reception is no matter of surprise. In spite of its immaturity of conception, its vagueness of arrangement, and its inequality of style, the poem is now gaining the place to which its beauties entitle it.

Two years later, in 1835, appeared *Paracelsus*, a dramatic poem on the famous philosopher or quack-

of the Middle Ages. The subject of this poem was suggested to him by a Frenchman, a year before when Browning went to Russia and rode about fifteen hundred miles in this tour. *How they brought the Good News* was also suggested by an incident in Russia. *Paracelsus* touches two subjects which always attracted Browning—the psychology of a quack and the usefulness of knowledge. It is unquestionably an astonishing work for a youth of twenty-three. It is characterised by the same fine seriousness and nobility of thought which mark *Paracelsus*. It did not win him popularity, though its art is more mature. He begins to find his own speech. To win knowledge the hero has flung away the joys of youth, the joy of social service and the joy of love. When the girl who loved him dies, he realizes all he has lost. This poem won him many friends among whom were the most distinguished literary men of the time. About this time his family removed from Camberwell to Hatcham and they became neighbours of Carlyle.

On Macready's suggestion Browning took up writing a drama. The famous actor told him that he had been assisting Forster in writing his *Life of Strafford* and the same theme could be chosen by the poet for the drama. Browning who had already begun *Sordello* laid it aside and began *Stafford* which was produced at Covent Garden in 1837, Macready playing the hero's part. It did not prove a great success on the stage, and though Browning continued to write dramatic pieces, he was deterred from producing for the stage, till he wrote *A Blot in the Scutcheon* in 1843. Under any conditions Browning's plays would gain little success on the stage.

Browning went to Italy in 1838 and his very visit cast a spell upon him. He could never forget the

charm of Venice and his best work in coming years was to be done under Italian skies. We know that *Sordello* had been laid aside for *Strafford*. It did not appear till 1840. It is a study in the inner history of an Italian poet who is mentioned by Dante in his 'Purgatorio.' From the artistic point of view it makes no advance, perhaps it is inferior to *Paracelsus*. The theme is also the same but the poem is charged with undue obscurity and is very difficult to understand. But it shows an immense amount of brain work and bristles with archaeological and historic scholarship. It is over weighted with the wealth of learning and symbolises restless quest for knowledge and power. It traces the development or the progress of a man from egotism to altruism, from self to non-self and human sympathy.

#### Marriage and After—

On his return from Italy Browning became very interested in the poems of Elizabeth Barrett. He met her and the acquaintance ripened into one of the most romantic of literary love stories. Miss Barrett was an invalid and her father was obdurate and would not allow her to marry. She was six years older than Browning. On September 12, 1846, they were quietly married and Elizabeth left the protection of her father a week later. Brownings ran away to Italy and made their home for many years in that country. Mrs. Browning found her health improved and they had a very happy time together. But in 1860 her health again began to fail and she died the following year in Florence, but not without leaving a son about eleven years old. Browning returned to London with a sore heart and devoted himself to the education of his son. In a sense he never quite recovered from this terrible shock. No poet had ever a more

perfect married life; and none has celebrated his love in more genuine strains.

In England, Browning began that social life which was in a marked contrast to the unsocial habits of Tennyson. He was deservedly popular in the drawing room. During his happy married life Browning published two closely connected religious poems *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* (1850), and two volumes of *Men and Women* (1855), containing some of his finest work in the line of dramatic poetry. But no less important were the eight parts of a series entitled *Bells and Pomegranates*, several plays and a collection of *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. These works exhibit every side of Browning's genius, and in them he appears more of an artist than a thinker or moralist. Great as was his dramatic genius, his real field was not the stage. In 1864 he produced in London *Dramatis Personae*. Having surrendered the drama he threw much of his material into monologue form and showed a wider outlook upon life, and a stronger intellectual power. Then came in four volumes in 1868-69 *The Ring and the Book* in which a story of a murder provides the foundation for a series of character studies, extraordinarily penetrative and brilliant. But the work runs in more than 20,000 lines of blank verse and makes the reader weary with prolixity and repetition.

This gigantic work may be said to divide Browning's career into two periods: the earlier one is of shady growth and fine accomplishment, and the later period of obvious poetic decay. In the last seventy years of his life he produced very little which could add to his fame, though there is much that detracts from it. There are, no doubt, occasional flashes of the old power, as in *Dramatic Idylls* (1879-80), and occasional poems. In *Aslando* (1889) the

lyric note is still clear and at times strong too. The message and outlook upon life remain, of course, the same but the old poetic vigour is gone from the last works.

His son married and settled in Italy as an artist, and thus the poet found opportunities of visiting the country which he had not done for long after the death of his wife. In 1889 while on one of his annual visit to his son at Venice, the poet caught cold and developed bronchitis. On December 12—the day of the publication of *Aslando*—the aged poet passed away. It was his wish to be buried beside his wife at Florence, but it could not be carried out. He was buried in Westminister Abbey in the Poet's corner on December 31, where his great contemporary Tennyson joined him only three years afterwards.

### Browning's Personality—

In the last years of his life before his poetic powers declined Browning showed amazing fertility. But it is not possible here even to mention the works excepting the most important ones. He won popularity also and was honoured in intellectual circles. He had a very large acquaintance, particularly among literary men : and his intimate friends included many women. In his earlier appearances in society Browning presents himself in quite a romantic manner. Macready, his actor friend, wrote of him. "He looks and speaks more like a young poet than any one I have ever seen." Browning seems to have left at this time this impression of his physical charm on many people. When he was attending lectures at University College he looked a bright handsome youth with long black hair falling over his shoulders. He was full of ambition, eager for success, eager for

fame, and, what is more, determined to conquer fame and to achieve success.

In society he was always anxious to avoid the air of intellectual eminence. He was not a 'damned literary man.' His culture was deep and wide and he possessed an extraordinarily retentive memory. He could repeat the best passages in the poets of half a dozen languages. He was an accomplished musician, being well-trained both in the theory and in the practice of the art. He had some skill as a draughtsman, painter and modeller, and was a good critic of numberless works of art he had seen. His capacious mind was enlarged by travel, by study, and by conversation with very many of the most cultivated men of his time. In disposition he was cheerful and hearty. His life, like his works, was full of a breezy, healthy happiness. He was not a pessimist though he believed that in his life 'sorrow did and joy did nowise preponderate.' He was a little obstinate and occasionally showed fierceness and grossness. "I was ever," as he says, "fighter." He was not above the English habit of declaiming vigorously against what he did not understand. On the whole he was a genial, true-hearted, noble-minded man, whose life, unlike that of so many poets, did not shame his works. His genius did not lead him into eccentric or erratic ways of life. He was eminently sane and sober in every day life. The whole theory of his life he sums up in the lines.

- "One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
- Never doubted clouds would break,
- Never deemed though right were worsted, - wrong would triumph ;
- Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
- ... sleep to wake."

## HIS POETRY.

## Four Periods—

The development of Browning as a writer conveniently falls into four periods.

(1) From 1832—1846. This is the period of experiments in which he tries to find the true medium for his poetic genius. He essays many forms, the monologue, the narrative drama and the pure lyric. But he conclusively finds that the form most suited to him is the dramatic lyric. Even in this period we find Browning, the man and the thinker, veiled in embryo, and Browning the artist is but faintly suggested. We find in the work of this period a young man's unclouded idealism, his egotism and his susceptibility to the influence of other poets, specially Shelley and Keats. Before the end of this period, Browning finds himself completely, and the artist outpaces the moralist and the thinker.

(2) From 1846—1869. This period is marked by the decline in the artistic purpose and lack of imaginative beauty. It is the intellectual side of Browning which now begins to get the upper hand, though the dramatic note runs throughout the multi-form expressions. The happiest results are produced, however, when the intellectual and emotional elements are blended together. *The Ring and the Book* marks the close of this period.

(3) From 1869—1876. Much that he wrote during this period might have been written with greater advantage in prose. The intellectual element is now distinctly predominant and the artistic purpose shows lamentable decline. Browning, the thinker with his irrepressible philosophy is too much in evidence at this time.

4. From 1876—1899. The untiring vagaries of the thinker gradually disappear and we again welcome Browning as an artist. The force and beauty of the earlier poems have not been caught in their full measure, but we feel more in the realm of poetry than in that of philosophy. Browning shows amazing capacity of production. It was for a short time before his death that his poetic powers declined. In *A Islando* we have his swan song and his whole philosophy of life given just at the end in a few lines, as if in a nutshell.

#### Characteristics of his Poetry—

1) **The Poet of Man**—When Browning began to write great tendencies distinguished the poetry of the time. Wordsworth, and in a different kind Keats had revealed the beauty and wonder of nature : Scott had recalled the romantic and human interest of the past ; Coleridge, Byron and Shelley, in very various ways, had awakened new interest in man, and in the problems of man's existence. None of these tendencies is foreign to Browning, but it is the third which is predominantly his concern. Others are subdued to the strong predisposition of his mind. Browning has been called "The poet of man." But so was Tennyson. When we say that Browning is the poet of man we mean not a poet of humanity in the mass—but of men and women as individuals. And he liked them better for their idiosyncrasies and strongly marked exceptional qualities. In dealing with his characters he concerned himself almost entirely with their inner life and brought out their moral and spiritual conflicts.

2) **Dramatic in Principle**—In his dramatic monologues we find almost complete subordination of action to pure psychological interest. Thus the great mass



of his work is 'dramatic in principle' though his characters do not express themselves in action but are always analysing themselves. As William Sharp observed, "Shakespeare works as with the clay of human action ; Browning as with the clay of human thought," his strong point being an extraordinarily acute psychological analysis. But it is to be noted that despite his insistence upon his artistic objectivity, he continually uses dramatic form for the indirect conveyance of his own ideas. Hence the best of Browning's poems are not dialogues, but monologues. The person to whom the subject talks matters nothing, he should talk to reveal his character as if he was dissecting it. He has the astonishing power of actualising the fleeting moods and yet he is not a great dramatist, as his works though dramatic in principle lamentably fall short of the requirements of stage machinery. And so Browning is not a dramatist but a dramatic philosopher. For example, *Pippa Passes* is quite charming for its lyric beauty, insight and passion, but it cannot be acted at all.

(3) His originality—Browning is a poet of striking originality and great vigour. In his early poems are found distinct traces of the influence of Keats and Shelley, and he is often imitative too. But his genius ripened early, and its amazing fertility, power of invention and vigorous thought are all remarkable. They are unique in the history of literature. He stands alone : neither is he a disciple of any poet, nor a model for others to follow and imitate. His writings are spontaneous outbursts of a glittering intellect and spiritual hopefulness. They are not without emotion, but generally it is intellect which predominates. For him poetry was not meant merely to amuse and entertain. It was a serious thing for himself as well as the reader: Unless it stimulated thought

dently for its own sake his nature-poetry was sure to have an important place among the works of the Romantic poets. But he subordinated his interest in nature to his interest in man. There are passages in his works, though brief, which show his power of observation and accurate description. But they are not substantiated, as immediately the poet lapses into their application to a human problem.

### His Philosophy :—

Browning has clearly set forth his attitude towards life. His poetry became increasingly reflective, and though his art suffers, he gives us in unmistakeable terms his own view of life and man's purpose in this world. The most striking feature of Browning's poetry and message is its optimism. The poet does not deny the existence of evil. It is there. But it can be made productive of good. This is the only sane view of life where good and evil are hopelessly mixed up together. He never questions the existence of a supreme authority, or God, controlling the manifold energies of the world : and he conceives of God as a distinct personality from the life of nature and man. He does not belong to the pantheistic school of Wordsworth ; nor is he a deist believing in a Deity infinitely remote and unmindful of the lot of mankind, or tyrannous, as in Shelley, or actively ironic as in Thomas Hardy. Sympathetic communion is established between the Creator and the created by the attributes of power, knowledge and love. God we may conceive under the three aspects—as infinite power, as infinite wisdom, and as infinite love. But the soul is satisfied only with the assurance of God as love and if we have to seek Him we must remember "love finds Him by first leap."

The other transcendental certainty for Browning is the soul. Life is full of failure, sorrow and sin. The mystery of such a life is always baffling. Browning believes that the 'broken arcs' of earth will presently be united in heaven's 'perfect round.' This belief is at the bottom of his irrepressible optimism. Evil for him is a factor in the development of the soul. This life is only a probation and our existence here is only the starting point, and our sins when looked at in the light of eternity, acquire a spiritual value. Suffering, struggle, failure, and imperfection all can be made instrumental in the progress of the soul. He rejects asceticism and all its implications.

The best exposition of his philosophy is to be found in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* in which old age is glorified and lowest work, however insignificant its apparent results may be, is praised for its effect upon the worker and his character. Work kindles our minds and stimulates our nature, and its value is not to be judged by the reward which the world gives us. The generous emotions, the high resolves, the unspoken hopes which may accompany disinterested work are far more important than its merely material results. Opinions, ideas and thoughts are sure, to be valued independently of their expression or realization. He emphasises individual effort and stirs soul out of its sluggishness and apathy. God in His grace will complete what we fail to achieve. The whole poem imparts to man a tonic of optimism and assures him "the best is yet to be."

As a Poet-Love—Love Poet

It was love which called forth the fullness of the powers of Robert Browning. In the domain of human character there is hardly any bent or trait,

a passion or propensity, which he did not touch, but it is some phase of love that he gathers his full strength to depict. There is no exaggeration in the statement that the removal of love from among Browning's themes would be the removal of his most original as well as his most massively valuable contribution to literature. It would have left the poet himself a man without purpose in a universe without meaning.

Browning's own love for Elizabeth Barrett is one of the supreme love stories in literature. The unclouded felicity of a perfect union in which intellect, passion and parenthood were equally powerful factors, and which brought about a mutual penetration of the two intense personalities, makes it difficult to think of the one without thinking of the other. Browning's own propitious and happy love did not prevent him from exploring its eddies and backwaters which his dramatic genius suggested. And consequently there is hardly any phase of love which he does not celebrate. He is not satisfied by describing merely the eternal beauty and charm of the 'fairest wights' or a particular mood. He treats of the actual passion, and in the course of love he concentrates his attention at any moment he likes, and by his masterly analysis brings out the supreme significance of the moment. He creates novel situations and is not satisfied merely by sudden outbursts of grief or raptures of enjoyment. Out of disappointment and grief he gathers strength of character. The bitterness of disappointment leaves behind its chastening influence and stirs to new resolves and other ventures. And all this he combines with the praise of beauty which any Elizabethan would be proud to sing. Youthful passion and its splendid glow are also not left out, though the

the triumphs of love are sung in poems of wifehood and motherhood. There is no phase of love which is not enriched by his imagination as well as emotion. Browning's sentiment and emotion is fiercely realistic and we are astonished by the realism of his love-poetry // "Sentiment must have reality ; emotion demands the real fields, the real widows' homes, the real corpse and the real woman. And therefore Browning's love poetry is the finest love poetry in the world, because it does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven, but about windowpanes and gloves and garden walls. It does not deal much with abstractions ; it is the truest of all love poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had a meaning beyond the power of any dictionary to utter, and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to compute. He expresses the celestial time when a man does not think about heaven, but about a parasol. And therefore he is, first, the greatest of love poets, secondly, the only optimistic philosopher except Whitman." // (Chesterton).

### Browning and Tennyson— X

While as thinker and artist Tennyson always leaned towards the conventional, Browning's unconventionality in matter and manner is one of his most conspicuous characteristics. Tennyson was the representative of his age and gained undisputed popularity. He was the voice of the people and gave poetic utterance to the prevailing beliefs and doubts. Browning took a long time to gain ear of the public, and his popularity remained confined to a small circle. People growing weary of the Tennysonian tradition welcomed Browning's fresh-

ness of thought and style. Tennyson kept on revising and polishing his verses and attained exquisite effects in melody and diction : Browning, though never a careless writer, was too impetuous and impatient to think much about the refinements of art. He made bold experiments in metrical forms and expressed in poetry profound philosophical thoughts, but not without violence to simple, direct language. Tennyson is less profound but is always clear : Browning is often obscure but seldom trivial. If Tennyson's popularity had its basis in voicing the contemporary thought, Browning was in advance of his age and claimed homage in an increasing measure from coming generations.

If Browning is less curiously studious of perfection; he has a more genuinely lyrical note. Critics have spent much time on Browning's thought and his various themes but not so much on his more serious lyrics. Tennyson is justly admired for his exquisite melody but Browning's art has not been appreciated properly. He made wonderful experiments and in spite of the ruggedness of his verses it is doubtful if happier results could be produced otherwise. Between thought and music he prefers the former. His thought and feeling and knowledge are generally out of all proportion to his powers of expression. To appreciate his art we have to recall the range of his metrical experiments and triumphs. Browning delights as an artist in experiments, but not exactly like Tennyson. The latter is intent upon a single intense mood of feeling and its decorative and richly musical elaboration : Browning is more dramatic and fanciful, liking the suggestion of a story, a psychological moment, eager to give his style the actualities of colloquial speech; even while he

decorates, and is eager also to suggest how the mind works under the influence of feeling.

Tennyson's message is summed up in the word 'law;' and therefore he often suppresses the individual. Browning's message, on the other hand, is the triumph of the individual will over all obstacles. The spirit of courage and manliness and joy in life, inform his poetry.

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### CRITICAL REMARKS

#### 1 ✓

Browning nowhere shows his native strength more clearly than in his treatment of love. He has touched this world-old theme—which almost every poet has handled, and handled in his highest manner—with that freshness and insight, which is possible only to the inborn originality of genius. Other poets have, in some ways, given to love a more exquisite utterance, and rendered its sweetness, and charm with a lighter grace. It may even be admitted that there are poets whose verses have echoed more faithfully the fervour and intoxication of passion, and who have shown greater power of interpreting it in the light of a mystic idealism. But, in one thing, Browning stands alone. He has given to love a moral significance, a place and power amongst those substantial elements on which rest the dignity of man's being and the greatness of his destiny, in a way which is, I believe, without example in any other poet. And he has done this by means of that moral and religious earnestness, which pervades all his poetry. The one object of supreme interest to him is the development of the soul; and his penetrative

insight revealed to him the power to love as the paramount fact in that development. To love, he repeatedly tells us, is the sole and supreme object of man's life, it is the one lesson which he has to learn on earth, and love once learnt, in that way matters little, "it leaves completion in the soul." Love we dare not, and, indeed, cannot absolutely miss. No man can be absolutely selfish and be man.

"Beneath the veriest ash, there hides a spark  
of soul

Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet  
pervade the whole

O'the grey, and, free again, be fire : of worth  
the same,

Howe'er produced, for, great or little, fame  
is fame."

Love, once evoked, once admitted into the soul  
" adds worth to worth

As wine enriches blood, and straightway sends  
it forth,

Conquering and to conquer, through all eternity,  
That's battle without end."

*Sir Henry Jones.*

2

Whether he be a greater poet than these or not,—a question whose answer can benefit nothing, for each poet has his own worth, and reflects by his own facet the universal truth—his poetry contains in it larger elements, and the promise of a deeper harmony from the harsher discords of his more stubborn material. Even where their spheres touch, Browning held by the artistic truth in a different manner. To Shelley, perhaps the most intensely spiritual of all our poet,

"That light whose smile kindles the universe,  
That beauty in which all things work and  
move,"

was an impassioned sentiment, a glorious intoxication ; to Browning it was a conviction, reasoned and willed, possessing the whole man, and held in the sober moments when the heart is silent. "The heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world" was lightened for Wordsworth, only when he was far from the haunts of men, and free from the "dreary intercourse of daily life," but Browning weaved his song of hope right amidst the wail and woe of man's sin and wretchedness. For Wordsworth "sensations sweet, felt in the blood and felt along the heart, passed into his purer mind with tranquil restoration," and issued "in a serene and blessed mood," but Browning's poetry is not merely the poetry of the emotions however sublimated. He starts with the hard repellent fact, crushes by sheer force of thought its stubborn rind, presses into it ; and brings forths the truth at its heart. The greatness of Browning's poetry is in its perceptive grip : and in nothing is he more original than in the manner in which he takes up his task, and assumes his artistic function. In his postponement of feeling to thought we recognize a new poetic method, the significance of which we cannot estimate as yet. But, although we may fail to apprehend the meaning of the new method he employs, we cannot fail to perceive the fact, which is not less striking, that the region from which he quarries his material is new.

*Ibid.*

3

Carlyle's cry of despair is turned by Browning into a song of victory. While the former regards the

struggle between good and evil as a fixed battle, in which the forces are immovably interlocked, the latter has the consciousness of battling against a retreating foe, and the conviction of coming triumph gives you vigour to every stroke. Browning lifted man high into an optimism and translated its battle into song. This was the distinctive mark and mission which give to him such power of moral inspiration.

*Ibid.*

4

Browning was very much a man of his time in his intellectual alertness, his eclecticism, his universal curiosity, and the analytical turn of his genius. But otherwise he did not so much represent as challenge his age. He challenged its philosophic negations, its scientific materialism, its religious uncertainties. He challenged its halting temper, its melancholy, its pessimism. "Hope hard in the subtle thing that's spirit" was the note of his message to his generation. The men and women of the mid-Victorian age were very much troubled about their souls, and many of them were asking doubtfully whether life was quite worth living after all. To them he brought a gospel of invincible religious faith and energising moral power, answering their misgivings in the words of his own Pippa :

"God's in His heaven—all's right with the world."

*Hudson.*

5 ✓

Has the lapse of years made Browning any more attractive to the masses, or even to the judicious few? He is said to have "succeeded by a series of failures," and so he has, as far as notoriety means success, and despite the perpetuation of his fault. But what is

the fact which strikes the admiring and sympathetic student of his poetry and career? Distrusting my own judgment, I asked a clear and impartial thinker, — "How does Browning's work impress you?" His reply, after a moment's consideration, was: "Now that I try to formulate the sensation which it always has given me, his work seems that of a grand intellect painfully striving for adequate use and expression; and never quite attaining either." This was, and is, precisely my own feeling. The question arises, What is at fault? Browning's genius, his chosen mode of expression, his period, or one and all of these? After the flush of youth is over, a poet must have a wise method, if he would move ahead. He must improve upon instinct by experience and common-sense. There is something amiss in one who has to grope for his theme and cannot adjust himself to his period; especially in one who cannot agreeably handle such themes as he arrives at. More than this, however, is the difficulty in Browning's case. Expression is the flower of thought; a fine imagination is wont to be rhythmical and creative, and many passages, scattered throughout Browning's works, show that his is no exception. It is certain caprice or perverseness of method, that, by long practice, has injured his gift of expression; while an abnormal power of ratiocination, and a prosaic regard for details, have handicapped him from the beginning. Besides, in mental arrogance and scorn of authority, he has insulted Beauty herself and furnished too much excuse for small offenders. What may be condoned in one of his breed in intolerable when mimicked by every jockanapes, and self-appointed reformer.

A group of evils, then, has interfered with the greatness of his poetry. His style is that of a man

no better than a very exasperating mode of pedestrian speech. So that the pure style in Browning, his exquisite melody when he is melodious, his beauty of diction when he bends to classic forms, the freshness and variety of his pictures — all this was unobserved, or noted only with grudging and inadequate praise.

*Edmund Gosse.*

7. ✓

As to the mightier kinds of love, those supreme forms of the passion, which have neither beginning nor end ; to which time and space are but names ; which make and fill the universe ; the least grain of which predicates the whole ; the spirit of which is God Himself ; the breath of whose life is immortal joy, whose vision is Beauty, and whose activity is Creation—these, united in God, or divided among men into their three great entities—love of ideas for their truth and beauty ; love of the natural universe, which is God's garment ; love of humanity, which is God's child—these pervade the whole of Browning's poetry as the heat of the sun pervades the earth and every little grain upon it. They make its warmth and life, strength and beauty. They are too vast to be circumscribed in a lyric, represented in a drama, bound up even in a long story of spiritual endeavour like *Paracelsus*. But they move, in dignity, splendour and passion, through all that he deeply conceived and nobly wrought ; and their triumph and immortality in his poetry are never for one moment clouded with doubt or subject to death. This is supreme thing in his work. To him Love is the Conqueror, and Love is God.

*Stopford A. Brooke.*

## S.

There is no nineteenth-century poet of the first rank whose ultimate position in the hierarchy is so doubtful as Browning's. He is at once astonishingly great astonishingly faulty : and only time can determine how far the faults will blur and obscure the greatness. On the one hand, in his finest pieces he sweeps the reader away with him as Tennyson rarely does : and he is incomparably more original in thought. On the otherhand, for every sin against art which speaks the pages of Tennyson, a hundred blot those of Browning ; and his very originality leads him into those irritating eccentricities to which reference has already been made. His style and rhythm are often intolerably rough and unmusical. He is full of strained expressions, irritating puns, harsh inversions. He has a provoking and really meaningless habit of clipping the particles,—“as we curtail the already cur-tailed cur.” Worst of all, perhaps, in his inability to select the essential and to reject the unimportant. He pours out the whole farrago of his thoughts, and sometimes does not take the trouble to set them in order. This is the meaning of charge of verbosity which has been brought against him. He is not verbose in the sense that he takes many words to express a given idea : on the contrary, he is often condensed even to a fault. But he is verbose in the sense that he gives expression to many thoughts when a few would suffice : the total effect might be produced in less space than he takes. .... Browning is in danger, therefore, of being smothered by his own luxuriance. No one who carefully observes what has lived and what has failed to live in past literature will dispute that faults such as these are a dangerous burden for the back of any author....

He is careful of the thought, but careless of the expression. It seems the wise and right and manly choice—that is, if for any reason it be impossible to make both perfect. Yet it is questionable whether it is the choice which makes for permanence of fame..Browning has many poems in which beauty of style is conjoined with profundity of thought, and in those poems lies the hope for the permanence of his fame.

*Hugh Walker.*

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## IMPORTANT DATES IN BROWNING'S LIFE.

- 1812. Robert Browning born.
- 1833. *Pauline* published.
- 1834. Travels in Russia.
- 1835. *Paracelsus* published.
- 1836. *Porphyria's Lover* published.
- 1837. *Strafford* produced.
- 1838. First visit to Italy.
- 1840. *Sardello* published.
- 1841. *Pippa passes* appeared.
- 1846. Married Elizabeth Barrett the poetess.  
Went to Italy. *Bells and Pomegranates* completed.
- 1849. Browning's mother died. Birth of a son in Italy.
- 1850. *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* published.
- 1855. *Men and Women* published.
- 1861. Mrs. Browning died in Italy. *Prospectus* written. Return to England.
- 1864. *Dramatis Personae* published.
- 1866. Browning's father died.
- 1868. *The Ring and the Book* finished.
- 1880. *Dramatic Idylls* finished.
- 1889. Browning died in Italy. Buried in Westminster Abbey. *Asolando* published.

## PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

The rain set early in to-night,  
The sullen wind was soon awake,  
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
And did its worst to vex the lake :  
I listened with heart fit to break,  
When glided in Porphyria ; straight  
She shut the cold out and the storm,  
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm ;  
Which done, she rose, and from her form  
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,      11  
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
And, last, she sat down by my side  
And called me. When no voice replied,      15  
She put my arm about her waist,  
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
And all her yellow hair displaced,  
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
And spread o'er all her yellow hair,      20  
Murmuring how she loved me—she  
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour  
To set its struggling passion free  
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,

And give herself to me for ever. 25  
 But passion sometimes would prevail,  
     Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain  
     A sudden thought of one so pale  
         For love of her, and all in vain :  
         So, she was come through wind and rain  
 Be sure I looked up at her eyes 31  
     Happy and proud : at last I knew  
     Porphyria worshipped me ; surprise  
         Made my heart swell, and still it grew  
         While I debated what to do.  
 That moment she was mine, mine, fair  
     Perfectly pure and good : I found  
 A thing to do, and all her hair  
     In one long yellow string I wound  
         Three times her little throat around,  
 And strangled her. No pain felt she ; 40  
     I am quite sure she felt no pain.  
 As a shut bnd that holds a bee,  
     I warily oped her lids : again  
     Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.  
 And I untightened next the tress  
     About her neck ; her cheek once more  
 Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:  
     I propped her head up as before,  
         Only, this time my shoulder bore  
 Her head, which droops upon it still :  
         The smiling rosy little head.

So glad it has its utmost will,  
That all it scorned at once is fled,  
And I, its love, am gained instead !                   55  
Porphyria's love : she guessed not how  
Her darling one wish would be heard.  
And thus we sit together now,  
And all night long we have not stirred,  
And yet God has not said a word !                   60

R. BROWNING.

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## NOTES.

1-5. *The rain set etc.*—“The opening is written with a power of dramatic suggestion, culminating in the simplicity of the fifth line and the suspense of waiting for Porphyria” Ernest Rhys. The inclement weather reflects the gloom and dejection of the lover’s heart. *Sullen*—ill-tempered or angry. Nature is endowed with human feelings. This is what Ruskin calls “pathetic fallacy.” *Awake*—began to blow. *For spite*—maliciously. *Did its worst*. . . . . *lake*—violently agitated the lake. *Heart fit to break*—the lover’s heart full of despair and dejection. He had no hope of ever meeting his love.

The lover was sitting alone in his room, his heart full of despair and dejection: and nature outside also seemed to reflect his feelings, and deepen his gloom, because the rain fell and high wind tore the tops of elm trees and violently agitated the lake.

6-15. *When glided in Porphyria*—Porphyria suddenly and silently entered the lover’s room when he had least expected that she would at all come. Straight—straightway: at once. *She shut the cold out*—closed the doors to keep the cold storm out. *And kneeled*. . . . . *up*—she kindled the smouldering fire into a blaze. Immediately she enters the cheerless room changes its aspect. Her movements are quick and her presence brings about a dramatic change in the room. *Grate*—fireplace. *From her form*—from her person. *Withdrew*—removed: took off. *Dripping*—drenched with rain. Her garments had become wet as she had come while it was raining. The poet

shows that it was a sudden impulse which brought her to the lover's place, and not a premeditated plan. **Soiled—wet.** **Called me**—addressed the lover. Her quick movements and animated spirits are in contrast with the dumb astonishment of the lover.

Suddenly she came in through the open door and shut it to keep the rain and storm out; and kindling the smouldering fire made a cheerful blaze in the hearth and she made the room warm. She took off her wet garments and gloves, removed her hat and let fall her damp hair, and then sitting by the side of the silent lover called him, who was struck dumb with astonishment.

15-25. **When no voice replied**—the lover did not speak. Perhaps he was not yet sure that Porphyria was actually there or he was seeing only a vision or dream; or he wanted to know if she loved him. **She put my arm etc.**—all her movements are expressive of love. **Murmuring how she loved me**—then she assured him how she loved him. The lover was not aware till then of the fact that he too was loved in return. Then if she too had been loving him why did she not express her love before her sudden appearance that night in his room? To such an imagined questioned of the silent lover she replied in the words that follow. **She too weak**—she had not the courage. **For all her heart's endeavour**—her heart yearned to set itself free and openly love him. Her heart desired that she should respond to his love and give herself up to him; but she had not the courage to do so. **To set its struggling.....pride**—pride of social position and high birth prevented love from having its own way. **The struggling passion**—love in her heart which struggled against her weakness, pride and vanity. **Vainer ties dissever**—cut asunder the

26-35. But passion . . . . . prevail—but passionate love would triumph over conventions. Love would prove too strong for any restraints. Nor could to-night's gay . . . . her—though she was in the midst of gay company feasting and dancing, her mind could not help thinking of her lover who for her sake had grown pale and was living a cheerless unhappy life. One—her lover. And all in vain—and his love never returned. Be sure—the lover addresses the hearer. Happy and proud—Browning wrote first 'Proud, very proud,' Worshipped me—that he was adored by her and his love was returned. Surprise made . . . what to do—knowing for the first time that he . . . loved by Porphyria his heart swelled with joyful surprise, and his surprise grew from more to more while he was thinking what to do.

But to-night her love prevailed and she slipped away from gay company and came away to meet her lover. While she was in the midst of dance and feasting suddenly the thought of her lonely and sad

lover crossed her mind. She felt that he had been unhappy and his love had never been rewarded or returned. And so she left the company and came away to him through wind and rain. When the lover learnt for the first time that she also adored him and his love had not been despised, he looked into her eyes and his heart swelled with pride and joyful surprise. And as his pride grew he debated within himself what he should do.

36-45. That moment.....mine—the lover felt that at that moment he possessed her against the whole world. The word "moment" is emphatic. The lover was not sure what should happen afterwards. He feared separation and passing away of her nobler sentiment which at that moment was prompted by pure love. Perfectly pure and good—at that moment when love triumphed she was a perfected being. Love had its free play and had broken asunder the ties of the world. In that sublime moment she was fit for heaven. I found a thing to do—suddenly he resolved upon doing something: an idea struck him. He decided to kill her while she was his and was swayed by the feeling of pure love. No pain felt she—and how could she feel any pain? Had she not given herself up to him, and was she not under the spell of love? Warily oped her lids—after killing her he very tenderly opened her eyes. Again laughed.....stain—the eyes betrayed absolutely no sign of the pangs of death and they seemed to be laughing as in her life-time.

At that moment he realized that Porphyria was his own and belonged to nobody else. She was sublime in her love and had become a perfected being. She was fit for heaven; and so at once the idea struck the lover's mind and he decided to kill

her, before she fell from grace and the spell of perfect love was gone. He twisted her long beautiful hair in a cord and wound it thrice round her little neck and strangled her. For her salvation he stained his soul and committed murder. He was sure that Porphyria felt no pangs of death. Tenderly he opened her eye which was like a bud imprisoning a bee in it, and he found that the eye betrayed no sign of death pangs. It retained its cheerful aspect even after death.

46-60. And I untightened....neck—he removed the twisted cord of hair from the neck. Her cheek ....bright—even death could not rob her of the bloom of youth. Burning kiss—passionate and ardent kiss As before—in the same position in which she had held it before strangulation. My shoulder bore, etc.—instead of her shoulder bearing my head as before. Which drops....still—it is yet in the same position. So glad it has its utmost will—that its greatest desire has been fulfilled. That all it scorned ....is fled—scorn, hatred, family pride which had filled the head at one time were now all gone. And it's love....instead—and now it has gained the person whom she had loved. Her head which at one time was full of pride and vanity and cared more for conventions than for the lover was now tied up with him and these debasing notions had vanished. Porphyria's love—the lover himself. She guessed not....heard—she could have no idea as to how her cherished desire of uniting the two she had really loved would be fulfilled. Now she is freed from her husband she did not love and wed with the true lover. And thus we ...now—the lover and the dead beloved are still sitting together in the same posture. All night ...stirred—...sat motionless, the quick and the dead. And yet God has not said

a word!—more than one interpretation has been given of this line. The meaning seems to be that the lover had hoped to see some sign or divine indication approving his deed; but none had appeared so far. For him the deed was not a murder, it was an act prompted by the highest love. And so he desired to hear the voice of heaven approving his deed.

The lover removed the hairy cord from the neck and passionately kissed her cheek. It blushed showing that death had not left her quite cold. He raised up her drooping head and supported it on his shoulder, as she supported his on her shoulder before she was strangled. Even after death she looked as if smiling and happy her cherished desire of uniting with her lover had been fulfilled and her vain fears, conventional ties and pride which once filled her head had vanished. He imagined her to be supremely happy in the possession of her lover, though she had not known how her desire was going to be fulfilled. Thus the lover and Porphyria, the quick and the dead, remained sitting together the whole night, but he heard no voice of heaven approving his deed.

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## PROSPICE

### Introduction—

This poem was written within a few month's of Mrs. Browning's death in 1861, and was first published in *Dramatis Personae* in 1864. It is a tribute to her memory and may be taken as an intimate revelation of the poet's own creed. It is the most original poem on death in English literature and is a wonderful utterance of a brave soul expressing heroic contempt of death. This and the *Epilogue to Aslando* may be taken as Browning's testament to the world. "It is a poem of fearless self assertion uttered under pressure of the thought of Death. Shrinking and cowardice are contemned through the twofold inspiration of the belief in immortality, and the hope of human love to be recovered" (W. T. Young). Browning died twenty-eight years after this poem was written and the desire he expressed in the poem was completely fulfilled. He remained conscious to the last moment and was aware of the nearness of death, and was unafraid.

### Analysis of the Poem—

meeting that will pay for all the pain—for in the storm will come peace, and then still light, and then the union of soul with soul in love's eternal life." (Fotheringham).

### Its message—

Browning himself was a great optimist and looked upon evil as a necessary step leading to perfection and goodness. Like ordinary people he was not afraid of death : on the other hand he challenged death to do its worst, because he was anxious to have the fullest experience of life. He did not want to escape the grim terrors of death. With-eyes unbandaged he liked to face death—the last conflict of life. He desired to meet the moment of dissolution with courage and calmness. It was his hope that even if vanquished his defeat would turn into victory. For would he not meet his departed wife and would not death prove a gateway to eternal union, and perfect peace of soul ? This hope emboldened him to face calmly what for ordinary people is the worst terror in life. His message is of cheering hope in the face of the greatest calamity, because ultimately nothing can come amiss.

### Appreciations—

*Prospice* was written in the autumn following Mrs. Browning's death. St. Paul speaks of those "who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage" ; the author of *'Prospice* and the *Epilogue to Asolando* was not of this class. Few man have written as nobly as he on awful "minute of night", and its fight with the "arch fear." Estimating it at its fullest import, as only a great imaginative mind can do, he is in face of "the black minute" and "the power of night"—the Mr. Greatheart of the pilgrims

## PROSPICE

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,

When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
The post of the foe;

Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
Yet the strong man must go:  
For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
And the barriers fall, 10  
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all.

I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,  
The best and the last!  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and  
forbore, 15  
And bade me creep past.

No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers  
The heroes of old,  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
Of pain, darkness and cold. 20  
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,

The black minute's at end,  
And the elements' rage the fiend-voices that rave,  
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,  
Then a light; then thy breast, 26.  
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest !

R. BROWNING.

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## NOTES

**The Title**—‘Prospice’ a Latin imperative, means “Look forward.” The poet is sure of his victory over death and looks forward with joy to the happy re-union with his predeceased wife, ‘the soul of his soul.’

1. **Fear death?**—do I fear death? The answer is an emphatic ‘no.’ Mark the dramatic intensity of the opening line, and note S. A. Brookes’ remark thereon. **To feel the fog in my throat**—these and the following words describe death. The construction is—‘Do I fear to feel the fog etc.’ To feel the choking sensation just when life is about to depart.

2. **The mist in my face**—feel the chilly sensation and dimness of sight indicating the approach of death.

3. **When the snows begin**—when numbness creeps up the limbs. **Blasts**—gasping or heavy breathing before death.

4. **I am nearing the place**—I am very near my end or death. **The place**—the poet is conceiving a citadel of death.

5. **The power of night**—the place where the darkness is thickest. **The press of the storm**—where the severity of the storm is greatest.

6. **The post of the foe**—the place where Death, the enemy of life, stands. The idea of death in these opening lines is conceived as a struggle and Browning is fully prepared to meet his foe—death. **The foe**—death.

7. Arch fear—the most dreaded thing, death  
In a visible form—fear assumes a form and appears  
as death.

8. Yet the strong man must go—however for-  
midable, death may be a courageous man must give  
it battle and face it. Browning himself was a strong  
man and he met his death boldly. The struggle  
with death is not to be taken in the ordinary sense  
of warding death and prolonging life. The idea  
is that one need not fear death when the time comes  
to leave this world.

9. For—the reason why we should boldly meet  
death. The journey is done—life should be looked  
upon as a journey which ends in death; when the  
“journey is over” death is inevitable. Then why  
fear it? The summit attained—the highest point in  
our life’s journey is reached. Life is often compared  
to one long ascent and when the height is gained  
one last struggle, with death, remains.

10. And the barriers fall—the barriers are  
removed “admitting the combatants to the lists  
where the final battle must be fought.” (Fowler).  
Now the fighters—man and death—are face to face  
ready for fight.

11. A battle’s to fight—the last fight is yet to  
be fought. Guerdon the prize or reward.

12. The reward of it all—the reward of having  
struggled all our life and ultimately with death  
Browning believed in the immortality of soul and  
the eternal peace which men can attain by living a  
proper kind of life in the world.

1-12. Browning assures himself that he is not  
at all afraid of death. He offers a bold challenge,  
as a courageous man, to death and is prepared to  
meet boldly all its attendant terrors—the choking  
sensation, coldness, creeping up the limbs, the heavy

breathing, dim eyes and colourless face. For others death is the greatest terror, as if it was fear incarnate. But the poet becomes bolder and bolder the nearer he approaches death. He is prepared for the grim struggle which inevitably comes at the end of life's journey. If he triumphed in the last struggle when standing face to face with death, the life's reward would be his and he would gain eternal peace.

13. *I was ever a fighter*—Browning's correct description of himself. All his life he fought like a brave man and never flew away from the combat. *One fight more*—with death.

14. *The best and the last*—it is of course the last combat because die he must, but it is the best also because it is the greatest and would prove the crowning achievement of life. No more struggles would be ahead and eternal peace would be his for prize.

15. *I would hate*.—he is a true hero and he does not like that death should show him any mercy by blinding him to its terrors before it claimed him as a victim. He would suffer the pangs of death and would not like to become unconscious before he actually died. It so happened in the case of Browning that he retained consciousness to the last moment. *Bandaged my eyes*—blinded me to its grim horrors, by rendering me unconscious to the agony of death. *Forbore refrained from doing* its worst or from putting forth all its terrors.

16. *And bade me creep past*—and ordered me to pass away quietly without meeting death face to face. He would die boldly facing the terrors of death and would desire no diminution in them. *Creep past*—slink by like a coward.

17. *No!*—the poet is very emphatic, as in the opening words of the poem. *Let me taste the whole*

**of it**—he desires to experience the agonies of death all at once. The whole experience of dying should be his. **Fare like my peers**—suffer as his equals did.

18. **The heroes of old**—the brave warriors of ancient times to whom death was never a terror.

19. **Bear the brunt**—bear the full fury **Pay glad life's arrears**—suffer all the unexperienced troubles which he may have escaped in life. He would desire to suffer intensely all the pains as if in a minute which he did not experience in his life time. **Glad**—gladly. **Arrears**—unexperienced pains and sorrows.

20. **Darkness and cold**—sufferings of life.

13-20. The poet was all his life a fighter and he would not shirk the last battle in which his triumph would be a crowning achievement. That death should show him any mercy by blinding him to its terrors, and by rendering him unconscious, would be hateful to him. He would not like to shirk death as if afraid of it. He desires to confront death bravely with all its terrors and its full fury and die like the ancient heroes who were courageous and brave like him. All the unexperienced sufferings which he had escaped in life should now fall to him at once and render his death full of agony. He does not want to be spared any of the grim terrors of death.

21. **For sudden the ...brave**—for brave people the worst suddenly turns into the best. Brave hearts turn defeat into victory. That is why he wants that all the agonies should fall to him and do their worst. This line gives us the robust optimism and unshakable faith of Browning.

22. **The black.. end** - pain and darkness pass away in an instant

23. Element's rage—fury of the storm. The whole body at the time of dissolution is in disorder, as if a storm was raging within man. The frenzied voices . . . rave—the horrible sounds which are supposed to be heard by the dying man. It may refer to the mental anguish also which troubles man when parting with life.

24. Shall dwindle . . . blend - subside and mingle harmoniously.

25. First a peace out of pain—a quietness will be born out of all sufferings. In the original Browning wrote : "first a peace, then joy."

26. Then a light—from pain to peace and from peace to light. Thy breast—the companionship of his deceased wife. Browning refers to his wife's death.

27. O thou soul of my soul—Mrs. Browning died in 1861 to whom the poet refers. "Browning wrote this quotation from Dante in his wife's Testament after her death : 'Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another better, there, where that lady lives, of whom my soul was enamoured'" (Young) I shall clasp thee again—he will feel that he possesses her once more. This happened 28 years after writing this poem.

28. And with God . . . rest—and every thing else he will leave to God to do what He thought best.

The poet is confident that for a brave man like him the worst will turn the best in a moment. Pain and darkness will soon pass away and out of the tumult will be born peace, and the darkness will yield place to light and he will be united eternally with his dear wife, the soul of his soul. The rest he will leave in the hands of God, who knows what is best for him.